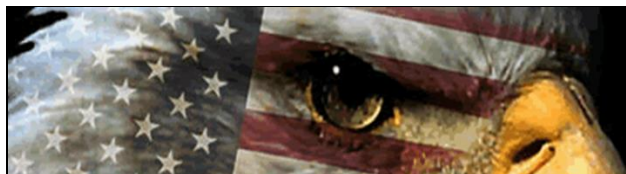



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HEADLINE	08/04 Havoc: busing migrants to East coast
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/04/us/migrants-buses-washington-texas.html
GIST	WASHINGTON — Lever Alejos arrived in the nation's capital last week on a bus with dozens of fellow Venezuelans who had journeyed more than 1,300 miles from their broken country to the United States.

Most had braved poisonous plants and thugs as they trudged through dense jungle on the Colombian border and waded in water up to their chins to cross the Rio Grande into Texas, some clutching babies.

After being processed by U.S. border authorities, the undocumented migrants were released into South Texas, free to go where they wanted. Mr. Alejos, 28, said he was offered two options: a \$50 bus ride to San Antonio or a free bus ride to Washington, D.C., paid for by the State of Texas. “I wanted San Antonio, but I had run out of money,” said Mr. Alejos, who has no family in the United States. “I boarded the bus to Washington.”

A few days later, he arrived in the nation’s capital, among a busload of weary migrants. He spent the first night in the plaza across from Union Station but eventually found a bed at Central Union Mission, where he hopes to stay until he can apply for asylum, get a work permit and find a job — a process that could take months.

A [political tactic by the governors of Texas and Arizona](#) to offload the problems caused by record levels of migration at the border is beginning to hit home in Washington, as hundreds of undocumented migrants arriving on the governors’ free bus rides each week increasingly tax the capital’s ability to provide emergency food and housing.

With no money and no family to receive them, the migrants are overwhelming immigrant nonprofits and other volunteer groups, with many ending up in homeless shelters or on park benches. Five buses arrived on a recent day, spilling young men and families with nowhere to go into the streets near the Capitol.

Since April, Texas has delivered more than 6,200 migrants to the nation’s capital, with Arizona dispatching an additional 1,000 since May. The influx has prompted Muriel E. Bowser, Washington’s Democratic mayor, to ask the Defense Department to send the National Guard in. The request has infuriated organizations that have been assisting the migrants without any city support.

A vast majority of recent bus riders are Venezuelans fleeing their crisis-ridden country, and many have also been arriving in New York, often via Washington. Eric Adams, mayor of New York City, [announced emergency measures](#) on Monday to enable the city to quickly build additional shelter capacity. The mayor, also a Democrat, said the city had received 4,000 asylum seekers since May, fueling a 10 percent growth in the homeless population, with about 100 new arrivals each day.

Venezuelans have been showing up daily at the offices of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York seeking help. “Their primary concern has been a place to stay, food for their children,” said Maryann Tharappel, who directs the organization’s immigrant and refugee services.

“The infrastructure in New York is not built for this,” she said. “We are not on the border.”

Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas and Gov. Doug Ducey of Arizona, both Republicans, blame President Biden for record numbers of migrants crossing the southern border.

Cities along the border in Texas and Arizona have at times been overwhelmed with a surge in unauthorized border crossings that peaked under the Biden administration, which has sought to unravel some of the harsh border restrictions imposed by former President Donald J. Trump.

While thousands of migrants have been [swiftly expelled](#) under a pandemic-related health order known as Title 42, thousands of others are being allowed into the country to pursue asylum claims because they cannot be returned to Mexico or their own countries.

State officials in Texas and Arizona have been greeting many of the migrants after their release from U.S. Border Patrol custody, offering them free bus rides to Washington in a bid to force the federal government to take responsibility for what they say is a failed immigration system.

After reaching their destinations, migrants may remain in the country for months or even years while they fight their deportation cases in court; they are allowed to work while they pursue asylum claims.

The situation has become acute in recent weeks with the arrival of so many Venezuelans, who cannot be expelled under Title 42 because Mexico will not take them and their own government does not have an agreement with the United States to accept deportation flights. And unlike most migrants from Mexico and Central America who have family and friends in the United States, Venezuelans often arrive with no money and nowhere to go.

Border Patrol encountered 110,467 Venezuelans along the southern border in the first nine months of this fiscal year, compared with 47,408 in the entire 2021 fiscal year. Overall unauthorized crossings have declined with the arrival of hot summer temperatures.

The situation has led to [back-and-forth accusations](#) with the Democratic mayors on the East Coast in recent weeks. In the latest salvo, on Monday, Mr. Abbott sent [a letter](#) to the mayors, Mr. Adams and Ms. Bowser, inviting them to tour the “dire situation” on the border with Mexico.

“Your recent interest in this historic and preventable crisis is a welcome development — especially as the president and his administration have shown no remorse for their actions nor desire to address the situation themselves,” Mr. Abbott wrote.

Fabien Levy, the New York mayor’s press secretary, had this statement: “Instead of a photo op at the border, we hope Governor Abbott will focus his energy and resources on providing support and resources to asylum seekers in Texas as we have been hard at work doing in New York City.”

The Texas governor and the mayors agree on one point: All three are calling on the federal government to act.

“The migrant crisis facing our city and our country through cruel political gamesmanship from the governors of Texas and Arizona must be dealt with at a federal level,” Ms. Bowser wrote in a [letter to White House officials](#).

In requesting a processing center at the D.C. Armory and activation of the National Guard, she said that the number of migrants had reached a “tipping point” that had “overwhelmed” the district’s ability to handle them.

Ms. Bower’s request drew rebuke from immigrant advocates who said she had ignored repeated requests for shelter space, a respite center and coronavirus rapid testing for the migrants, among other things.

“The last thing we want is a militarized response to a humanitarian crisis,” said Andrea Scherff, a core organizer with the Migrant Solidarity Mutual Aid Network, a coalition of grass-roots groups.

Noting that Washington is a sanctuary city for immigrants, she said, “We should meet housing needs for everyone.”

The Biden administration said it had been in touch with Mayor Bowser, but Karine Jean-Pierre, the White House press secretary, said the governors were using the migrants as a “political tool” for their own ends.

“There is a process in place for managing migrants at the border. This is not it,” she said, adding that the administration was continuing to expel some migrants, place others in custody and release those eligible to the care of local nonprofits “as they await processing.”

About 15 faith and community-based groups in Washington have opened their doors to the migrants, offering them meals, showers and hygiene items during daylight hours. But the increase in the frequency of buses, from two to four a day to now sometimes eight, has depleted donations and exceeded capacity, and many volunteers have contracted Covid-19, said Ms. Scherff.

“The mayors have been playing into the Republican governors’ hands,” said Adam Isacson, a scholar at the Washington Office on Latin America who studies the border.

“Of course they’re making noise about the migrant arrivals because those who need shelter are a strain on their cities’ social services,” he said. But “the tenor of their comments,” he said, is giving the governors ammunition to push for a clampdown on immigration, including such measures as erecting border walls and eliminating asylum.

On a recent night, migrants climbing down from three buses were greeted by volunteers and staff from SAMU First Response, an international aid organization that has received some funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and began operating in Washington in late June.

They were given water, pizza and granola bars, and some were provided tickets for onward travel. By 1 a.m., most had settled for the night on the marble floor of the East Hall of Union Station. Others, from earlier buses, were forced to sleep on the streets. It created an unusual tableau: unhoused Americans on one side of the plaza; on the other, migrants with their meager belongings splayed on the ground — all within sight of the Capitol.

Tatiana Laborde, SAMU’s managing director, said her organization had enough funds to buy tickets to other destinations for about a third of the migrants for whom they were providing services. The group’s shelter in Montgomery County, Md., could not provide long-term housing, she said.

Ten City Council members sent a letter to the Washington mayor urging her to not just seek federal assistance, but also release contingency funds and enlist staff members to help migrants, as well as provide Covid testing, isolation hotels and other resources.

“This is a crisis created by Republican leaders in other states, however, unfortunately it’s fallen on the mayor to allocate resources locally,” said Brianne Nadeau, the council member who prepared the letter.

Many Venezuelans have said that they made the journey to the United States because they believed that the country’s doors were open.

“On TikTok we saw that people were easily getting into the United States,” said Yennifer Ortiz, who made the trip with her partner, Luis Moreno, and their 5-year-old daughter, Sofia.

Their trek to the United States lasted 45 days, including nine days traversing the perilous jungle on the border of Colombia and Panama known as the Darién Gap, Mr. Moreno said.

By the time they reached Texas, they had no money and were happy to board a free bus to Washington. “They told us that here, there would be people to receive us and help us,” Ms. Ortiz said.

When their bus pulled in around 8 a.m. on a recent day, volunteers directed them to a respite center run by a church, where they bathed and received a fresh change of clothes. They spent their first night on park benches, and since then have been bouncing between the homes of Americans, they said.

Juan Rojas, 22, said that when he and a friend arrived in Washington, they were sent to a city shelter housing mainly Americans, where they felt unwelcome.

“The guys were yelling at us, and we couldn’t understand a word,” he said. “It was clear they didn’t want us there.” The pair left after two nights and spent a week sleeping on the streets, he said.

In recent days, Mr. Rojas said, they have been hosted by a “woman who helps migrants” some nights and in hotels arranged by volunteers other nights. He said that he had not yet given up on America after his odyssey.

	But he was not optimistic. “In Texas, they told us that here, we would get help with housing, work and everything else we needed,” he said. “It was all a lie.”
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HEADLINE	08/04 Russia shortfalls, opportunity for Ukraine?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/04/us/politics/russia-weapons-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — In the early phase of the war in Ukraine, shortages of soldiers and problems with equipment forced Russia to narrow its mission, abandon its assault on Kyiv and focus its offensive on the east.</p> <p>Now, as the fighting enters its sixth month, critical manpower and equipment problems could again slow Russian operations and give Ukraine’s counteroffensive a better chance to succeed, U.S. and European officials said.</p> <p>The signs of Russia’s challenges abound: artillery shells missing their targets, intercepts of Russian soldiers complaining they have been given old tanks and a sharply rising death and injury toll in its military ranks.</p> <p>But unlike earlier in the war, it could become harder for Russia to reset its strategy and recover, at least in the short term.</p> <p>U.S. and European officials say few powers have conquered a country and destroyed an opposing army with a mostly volunteer force, as President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia is attempting to do. But Mr. Putin has shown no indications that he wants any sort of full-scale draft, which would amount to an admission to his country that the fight in Ukraine will be a long war, not a short operation.</p> <p>Russia has announced, and the West has predicted, various pauses in the war. After the fall of the city of Lysychansk last month, for example, Russian commanders said their forces would pause and reset, but artillery attacks continued.</p> <p>This time, NATO and other officials say the reality on the ground should force the Russian military to slow its operations to reinforce depleted units, better protect its supply lines and move in new equipment. These officials concede it is possible that Mr. Putin could override the advice of his officers and order the drive in the east to continue through the summer. For all of Russia’s equipment and manpower issues, high energy prices mean Moscow is making enough money to fund its military.</p> <p>The expected Russian pause comes after the bloodiest phase of the war for both sides. Ukraine and Russia have lost thousands of soldiers, including some of their best and most experienced frontline troops, during the last weeks of a grinding artillery battle that destroyed cities and towns in the path of Moscow’s army.</p> <p>The Russian shortfalls have created an opportunity for the Ukrainian army, driving their decision to launch a counteroffensive, said senior U.S. military officials and American lawmakers who have visited Ukraine recently. More Ukrainian offenses, most likely in the south, are likely in the coming weeks, these officials said.</p> <p>“The Russians are exhausted, and you don’t want to give them time to regroup and rest,” said Representative Elissa Slotkin, a Michigan Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee who visited Ukraine last month with a small group of lawmakers. “I understand the desire to strike when they’re tired.”</p> <p>Russia has committed nearly 85 percent of its fielded army to the fight in Ukraine, drawing on troops from the country’s far east and deployments around the world, a senior Defense Department official said recently. The Russian military, European officials said, has been hard-pressed to bring reservists and new recruits into the fight.</p>

Estimates of how many Russian soldiers have been killed range from 15,000 to more than 20,000, with thousands more injured or missing. Even taking the conservative number, according to U.S. and allied intelligence officials, Russia has lost more soldiers this year than the Soviet Union lost in nearly a decade of fighting in Afghanistan.

In its search for recruits, Russia has had to lower its standards, Western intelligence officials said. Mr. Putin signed a law eliminating the age limit for Russians to sign their first contract to join the military. Western officials also said they have assessed that the Russian military is lowering health and fitness standards and giving waivers to people with criminal records to join.

Russia has tried to make up some of its manpower shortages using mercenaries from the Wagner Group, a private military force with ties to Mr. Putin. American intelligence reports have said that while mercenaries could make a difference in specific battles, there are not enough of them to make a strategic difference in the larger war, according to officials briefed on the assessments.

American officials said Russia's biggest problem is Mr. Putin's unwillingness to announce a wider draft. So far, the Russian military has been unable to recruit enough men fast enough to make up for the soldiers killed and wounded in action.

Even if Russia decided to press more reservists and conscripts into service, Western intelligence officials say Mr. Putin would face a severe bottleneck. The Russian military has already deployed many officers and instructors who would train conscripts or reservists to the front lines, a decision one Western intelligence official compared to eating the seed corn. Russia delayed its spring draft by two months, a sign it could not train those who were willing to serve, the Western officials said.

While not as acute as its manpower shortage, Russian equipment problems are significant. Russian forces, for example, have had to replace newer, more modern tanks with older versions. By some intelligence estimates, Russia has lost a third of its tanks. As it uses up stocks of precision-guided missiles, Russia has relied on artillery systems. But Ukraine's use of sophisticated weaponry has forced Russia to push them back from the front lines, diminishing their effectiveness.

Russia has a huge supply of artillery shells, the prime munition it is using in this stage of the war, American officials said. But even with those there are problems, according to Western intelligence officials. Many are aging and were stored in poor conditions, reducing their effectiveness by making their fuses unreliable.

U.S. and European export controls have effectively put pressure on Russian arms manufacturers, at least temporarily, forcing them to slow or halt production of high-end guided and other advanced munitions. The shortage has forced Russians to be judicious in their targeting — one reason the military has limited its attempts to strike moving convoys and instead focused on stationary targets like Ukrainian warehouses.

In recent weeks, Russia has been using an antiaircraft system, the S-300, to strike ground targets near the city of Mykolaiv, a sign, Ukrainian officials said, that Russia lacks missiles better suited for such attacks.

Senior U.S. military officers said the Russian shortages in manpower, weapons and munitions are already playing out on the battlefield. New Ukrainian tactics — enabled by Western equipment — have also effectively curbed the number of shells available at any time to Russian frontline troops.

Ukrainian soldiers have used American-supplied weapons like the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, to destroy dozens of Russian command posts, air defense sites and ammunition depots, disrupting the flow of munitions to frontline Russian forces.

Brig. Christopher King, the top British officer at a military cell in Stuttgart, Germany, that is coordinating the flow of donated Western arms and ammunition into Ukraine, said the HIMARS and other rocket artillery have allowed the Ukrainians to slow the Russians' "ability to supply themselves, which is exactly why we provided that to them."

	<p>Ukrainian artillery and tanks, of course, have also been destroyed. And a senior Ukrainian military official said like the Russian military, Ukraine had lost some of its best officers and soldiers in the first months of the conflict. But, the official added, Kyiv had far more officers with years of frontline fighting experience, which proved decisive in the first phase of the war.</p> <p>American and Western intelligence assessments lend credence to the idea that the next weeks or months will be critical for Ukraine. Even if Russian forces cannot be pushed back significantly, a strong counteroffensive could increase confidence among Ukraine's allies.</p> <p>American and British officials said Ukrainian officials have said they understand they have a limited amount of time to take advantage of Russia's apparent weakness.</p> <p>Representative Michael Waltz, Republican of Florida, who was part of the congressional delegation to Kyiv, said the United States should send more rocket artillery and other advanced weaponry to Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelensky told the members of Congress that if Mr. Putin locks in the current front lines, Ukraine will struggle to remain a viable state.</p> <p>"Zelensky believes the Russians are in a moment of weakness while they regroup to keep grinding forward before winter," Mr. Waltz said.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/04 'Permanent shock' to nursing homes?
SOURCE	https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2022/08/04/nursing-home-jobs-workers-quit-pay-covid-outbreaks/10219487002/
GIST	<p>Nursing home staffs shrunk in the weeks and months after severe COVID-19 outbreaks, according to a new study, and federal data shows most facilities lost more than half their nurses and aides in the past year.</p> <p>The study found facilities have struggled to refill openings, particularly among certified nursing assistants, who provide most bedside care – findings that both complicate and underscore the need for President Joe Biden's push to establish nationwide staffing-level requirements.</p> <p>"Will they come back? Or is this going to be a permanent shock to the caregiving workforce?" asked Karen Shen, the health economist who led the study.</p> <p>Increased nurse staffing is linked to better health outcomes for nursing-home residents, with registered nurses playing a particularly important role in managing the spread of infectious diseases. That reality gained broader significance during the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased public awareness of nursing-home shortfalls.</p> <p>The pandemic also brought attention to the challenges faced by nursing-home workers, who historically have been paid less than their counterparts in hospitals or government-run health programs.</p> <p>Shen says the study highlights not only the urgency to ensure nursing homes have adequate staffing during outbreaks, but also how facilities struggle to recover in the weeks and months that follow.</p> <p>"We were thinking more on the side of how many staff are absent because they're quarantining at the peak of the outbreak, but when we did the analysis, we found departures are an equally big, if not bigger, deal," said Shen, an assistant professor of Health Policy and Management at Johns Hopkins University.</p> <p>"Once a facility has a big outbreak, they see an increase in departures that's higher relative to facilities that aren't experiencing that sort of outbreak," she said. "They're seeing more people leaving their workforce permanently."</p> <p>Recommended minimum staff levels are rarely met</p>

America's roughly 15,000 skilled-nursing facilities serve a growing elderly population with higher medical needs than previous generations, as well as people of all ages with disabilities or who are rehabilitating after surgeries.

Even before the pandemic, at least 82% of facilities did not meet total nurse-staffing minimums recommended by the federal government to avoid care delays and harm to residents, according to a USA TODAY analysis of federal data from 2019.

The homes are funded almost entirely by reimbursements through Medicaid, which pays for about two-thirds of long-term stays in nursing homes, or Medicare, the primary payment source for short-term stays by the elderly and people with disabilities. Those two health programs pay about \$90 billion annually to nursing homes.

How much of that public money is spent on direct care is not well understood. The ownership structures of nursing homes have changed dramatically in the last 30 years from primarily small, local operations to nationwide chains with complex ownership structures.

Today, it's common for services to be divided among multiple companies, sometimes including involvement from private-equity firms or real-estate investment trusts. The tangle of business interests means an individual facility might appear to be losing money in annual reports to the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services even as its business partners and corporate owners report profits to shareholders.

"The industry is essentially a subcontractor for public dollars," said Matt Yarnell, president of SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania and chairman of an international nursing home workers council. "Governments need to hold the industry accountable and require better outcomes."

Pennsylvania state leaders have proposed [setting a higher bar for staffing levels](#) at nursing homes – one that still falls short of federal recommendations – and have budgeted another \$600 million annually for state Medicaid to help facilities pay for it.

The American Health Care Association, the largest lobbying organization for nursing homes, blamed low staffing on "Medicaid underfunding" that made it difficult for facilities across the country to "compete for and retain qualified, dedicated caregivers."

"Policymakers have continued to ignore the repeated pleas for help from our profession, and this inaction has put the sector in a very fragile condition," said Holly Harmon, a senior vice president with the group, in an email to USA TODAY.

In a [July news release](#), the organization cited an analysis by a financial consulting firm, which found that the expected staffing minimums would create 187,000 new jobs for nurses and nursing aides, but cost facilities nationwide an estimated \$10 billion a year. The industry report cautioned that facilities might cut back their nursing-home resident population by 18% to meet staffing standards if they are unable to expand their workforce.

"An enforcement approach will not solve this long term care labor crisis," Harmon said in that statement. In addition to increasing reimbursement rates for care, the organization has called for federal leaders to expand programs that support their staff: student loan forgiveness, tax credits, affordable housing and child-care assistance.

The industry organization surveyed 759 of its members in May – which is about 5% of nursing homes nationwide – and found that most had taken several steps to improve recruitment and retention. They said they had strengthened workplace culture, promoted staff, paid for training, offered bonuses and increased wages. They reported that the biggest challenge with hiring were a lack of interested candidates and an inability to offer competitive wages.

Pay, undoubtedly, will be a factor in whether nursing homes are successful in expanding their workforce. Competition from other health services will remain steep.

From 2019 to 2021, average wages increased 4% for registered nurses at hospitals and 9% at nursing homes – which still did not close the pay gap between the two, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Annual wages have been particularly slow to rise for nursing aides. While average hospital pay for aides increased 15%, to \$36,000 a year, those working in skilled nursing facilities only saw pay increase 4%, to \$30,000.

Richard Molloy, who leads the nation's largest advocacy group for nursing-home residents, sympathizes with the workforce challenges faced by operators amid a global pandemic and a time of economic instability. For him, the bottom line is that most facilities have failed to provide adequate staffing levels under decades-old rules. He hopes that new, tighter regulations would finally make a difference.

"President Biden's plans are the most ambitious and potentially the most valuable we've seen in 35 years," said Molloy, director of the Long Term Care Community Coalition.

Workload of nursing-home jobs increased in the pandemic

USA TODAY's analysis and academic research found that nursing homes, on average, maintained the same staffing levels during the pandemic as in the years before. However, that was largely because residents died or admissions were halted as workers left their jobs.

The nurses who remained often had a larger workload, with sicker patients and ramped up infection controls. When adequate supplies were available, changing gowns, gloves and masks between each room ate up precious time. With the homes closed to visitors, nurses – particularly aides – also found themselves responsible for routine care previously provided by some family members, such as feeding, clipping nails and socializing.

Amid the pandemic, they also witnessed more death among their patients and their coworkers.

"End-of-life care is part of our job, but the massive loss of life can't be unseen and folks weren't ready for that," Yarnell said.

The union leader, who once worked as a CNA, related stories shared by colleagues amid efforts to raise staffing standards in Pennsylvania. He said one fellow nursing assistant had told him she was responsible for putting pillowcases over the heads of dead residents, but also had been told not to wear a mask so she wouldn't scare those still living.

When USA TODAY investigated the chain that [reported the highest COVID-19 death rates](#) among residents during the worst pandemic surge – Trilogy Health Services – it found even lower-than-typical staffing levels.

Trilogy disputed the findings, saying it had misreported some deaths in its weekly reports to federal officials.

As COVID-19 cases spiked in the final months of 2020 and the first weeks of 2021, more than 140,000 nursing home residents died of the disease. During outbreaks, studies found deaths from other causes increased, too, which they say likely related to poorer care amid unprecedented demands on nurses. That same trend was found in the recent Johns Hopkins study of staffing levels during outbreaks.

Often, nursing homes relied on nurses to work extra shifts or hired contractors to fill in staffing gaps when regulars became ill, Shen said. Departures increased in the weeks after an outbreak, but most facilities refilled registered nurse and licensed nurse positions within a month.

Yet four months after the start of a severe outbreak, the analysis found facilities still reported fewer hours of care from nursing aides.

	<p>Those aides, disproportionately women and people of color, spend the most time caring for residents and make up the bulk of nursing-home budgets. During the pandemic, nursing assistants might have had the most exposure risk because they spent more time with more people, leading an uncertain number, but likely hundreds, to die of COVID-19.</p> <p>Nursing homes could face more challenges hiring nursing aides in coming months as exceptions to federal rules made during the pandemic are phased out, including one that allowed facilities to hire people without certifications to do aide work.</p> <p>One academic study completed for CMS in 2001 recommends one CNA should care for no more than eight residents, a standard that many nursing homes do not meet. The strain became worse during the pandemic, when Yarnell said daytime CNAs cared for more than 20 people and nighttime workers sometimes had twice that many.</p> <p>“Resident-care loads that are not humanly possible,” he said. “Not fair to the residents and not fair to staff.”</p> <p>The increased demands and personal health risks burned out many workers, Yarnell said. Others were devastated seeing residents die en masse without the comfort of loved ones at their side. Some decided to find new work with less stress or better pay. “We’ve got to make these better jobs,” Yarnell said. “Pay attention to the health of the workforce. I don’t think people are paying attention.”</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 France swelters under 2nd heat wave
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/health-france-weather-heat-waves-adbe171f8aaed872a437eae41ef83a99
GIST	<p>PARIS (AP) — Paris’ regional authorities warned residents to be vigilant Wednesday, with temperatures soaring to 36 degrees Celsius (97 Fahrenheit). In a tweet, the Ile-de-France prefecture also asked residents to moderate their water consumption amid a “major dry spell.”</p> <p>Elsewhere in France, some 27 departments have now been placed on “orange alert” with a heat wave spreading mainly to the east of mainland France. Temperatures are set to hit up to 40 C (104 F) in some places in the south. The heat will reach its peak Wednesday, and begin to decline Thursday.</p> <p>This August heat wave episode should be shorter than that of July, according to the French weather agency.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/04 US: Russia fake evidence in prison deaths
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-moscow-donetsk-prisoners-of-war-609be7f88cbcb2e730b7c5d1bf368df5
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. officials believe Russia is working to fabricate evidence concerning last week’s deadly strike on a prison housing prisoners of war in a separatist region of eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>U.S. intelligence officials have determined that Russia is looking to plant false evidence to make it appear that Ukrainian forces were responsible for the July 29 attack on Olenivka Prison that left 53 dead and wounded dozens more, a U.S. official familiar with the intelligence finding told The Associated Press on Wednesday.</p> <p>Russia has claimed that Ukraine’s military used U.S.-supplied rocket launchers to strike the prison in Olenivka, a settlement controlled by the Moscow-backed Donetsk People’s Republic.</p> <p>The Ukrainian military denied making any rocket or artillery strikes in Olenivka. The intelligence arm of the Ukrainian defense ministry claimed in a statement Wednesday to have evidence that local Kremlin-backed separatists colluded with the Russian FSB, the KGB’s main successor agency, and</p>

mercenary group Wagner to mine the barrack before “using a flammable substance, which led to the rapid spread of fire in the room.”

The official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the classified intelligence — which was recently downgraded — shows that Russian officials might even plant ammunition from medium-ranged High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, as evidence that the systems provided by the U.S. to Ukraine were used in the attack.

Russia is expected to take the action as it anticipates independent investigators and journalists eventually getting access to Olenivka, the official added.

Ukraine has effectively used HIMARS launchers, which fire medium-range rockets and can be quickly moved before Russia can target them with return fire, and have been seeking more launchers from the United States.

Earlier Wednesday, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he is [appointing a fact-finding mission](#) in response to requests from Russia and Ukraine to investigate the killings at the prison.

Guterres told reporters he doesn’t have authority to conduct criminal investigations but does have authority to conduct fact-finding missions. He added that the terms of reference for a mission to Ukraine are currently being prepared and will be sent to the governments of Ukraine and Russia for approval.

The Ukrainian POWs at the Donetsk prison included troops captured during the fall of Mariupol. They spent months holed up with civilians at the giant Azovstal steel mill in the southern port city. Their resistance during a relentless Russian bombardment became a symbol of Ukrainian defiance against Russia’s aggression.

More than 2,400 soldiers from the Azov Regiment of the Ukrainian national guard and other military units gave up their fight and surrendered under orders from Ukraine’s military in May.

Scores of Ukrainian soldiers have been taken to prisons in Russian-controlled areas. Some have returned to Ukraine as part of prisoner exchanges with Russia, but other families have no idea whether their loved ones are still alive, or if they will ever come home.

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HEADLINE	08/04 More going hungry, higher costs to feed
SOURCE	https://dnyuz.com/2022/08/04/more-americans-are-going-hungry-and-it-costs-more-to-feed-them/
GIST	<p>The first time Kelly Wilcox drove her 2017 Dodge Grand Caravan to the food pantry near her home in Payson, Utah, she noticed one thing right away that surprised her: newer models of Toyota and Honda sedans and minivans. “I saw a bunch of other people with cars like mine, who had kids in cars,” she said.</p> <p>The mother of four young sons hadn’t known what to expect when she made that initial trip to Tabitha’s Way Local Food Pantry this spring. She did know she needed help. Her husband had lost his job. He soon found a new job as an account manager, but with inflation it hasn’t been enough. “We still cannot keep up with the bills,” said Ms. Wilcox, 35. To keep her children fed this summer, she has visited the pantry regularly and said that barring a change, like a drop in food prices or a raise for her husband, it will be necessary for the foreseeable future.</p> <p>Tabitha’s Way’s location in Spanish Fork, Utah, a town of about 44,000 outside Provo, used to serve roughly 130 families each week, offering essentials like fresh produce and baby formula. This year — serving people like Ms. Wilcox and her family, whose paychecks are not going far enough — that number has climbed above 200.</p> <p>The increase in food insecurity is not about a sudden wave of joblessness as it was when the economy ground to a halt in 2020 in the first wave of the pandemic. It is about inflation — higher prices for</p>

housing, gas and especially food. According to the [last report](#) on consumer prices, the cost of food increased 10.4 percent from a year earlier, the largest 12-month increase since 1981.

Food banks are trying to meet these needs while coping with decreasing donations and, in some cases, increased awareness among people who need help that food banks are an option.

Data from the Census Bureau showed that last month, 25 million adults sometimes had not had enough to eat in the previous seven days. That was the greatest number since just before Christmas in 2020, when the pandemic continued to take a high economic toll and the unemployment rate was nearly twice what it is today.

A [survey conducted](#) by the Urban Institute found that food insecurity, after falling sharply in 2021, rose to roughly the same level this June and July as it reached in March and April 2020: Around one in five adults reported experiencing food insecurity in the previous 30 days. Among adults with jobs, 17.3 percent said they had experienced food insecurity, compared with 16.3 percent in 2020. (The most recent survey had 9,494 respondents and a margin of error of 1.2 percentage points.)

On a local level, those trends are reflected in what Wendy Osborne, the director of Tabitha's Way, sees in Utah. "There are more people who have jobs, they're working, they're just not making enough," she said.

Ms. Osborne said the majority of families that picked up food from Tabitha's Way were employed with one or more jobs. "I repeatedly hear: 'I've never had to use a food pantry. I'm the one who's helped people, not the one who needed help,'" she said.

Lines of thousands of cars outside food banks and food pantries were among the iconic images of the first phase of the pandemic, when the economy contracted after nationwide shutdowns. The federal government helped with extra funds and extra food. Individual donors gave money.

"There was a big charitable response at the beginning. There was a very robust government response as well," said [Elaine Waxman](#), an expert on food insecurity and federal nutrition programs at the Urban Institute in Washington. But the end of enhanced unemployment, stimulus checks and monthly child tax credit payments, combined with inflation, means that problems are starting to crop up again. This time donations are down just as the need is rising again.

"We're good in a crisis. We rise to the occasion," Ms. Waxman said. "But we don't know what to do if the crisis persists."

Feeding America, the [largest network of food banks](#) in the country, which helps supply the smaller frontline pantries where customers pick up food, said 65 percent of member organizations surveyed had reported an increase from May to June in the number of people served. Just 5 percent reported a decline.

At the same time, cash donations, a huge help at the start of the pandemic, are down. In the first quarter of the year, revenue for the national office fell nearly a third from a year earlier, to \$107 million from \$151 million.

"You're in the middle of a battle, and people are leaving the field," Claire Babineaux-Fontenot, the chief executive of Feeding America, said in an interview. On visits to food banks, she said, "I walk into freezers that don't have very much food in them."

Feeding America's network includes 200 food banks and 60,000 food pantries and meal programs. Over the four months for which data is most recently available, February to May, 73 percent of Feeding America's food banks surveyed said food donations were down, with 94 percent saying the cost of food purchases had increased and 89 percent saying they were paying more for transportation to acquire or deliver food.

Through the first three quarters of the 2022 fiscal year, Feeding America said, it received 1.14 billion pounds of food from federal commodities programs, compared with 2.46 billion pounds a year earlier.

The manifold pressures on the emergency food systems are evident at Tabitha's Way. In the first half of 2022, food drive donations fell nearly two-thirds compared with the same period last year. Donations of food from grocery stores and restaurants were less than a quarter of what they were the year before. Cash donations dropped to less than \$700,000 from nearly \$1.1 million.

Just like consumers, the pantry is spending more on the food it buys. Fuel to pick up donated food is costing more, even if down slightly from recent highs. And with unemployment at 2 percent in Utah, the labor costs for drivers and skilled staff have gone up, too. Ms. Osborne said the average wage for her staff was \$20 or more per hour, up from \$16 a year ago. "We don't want our employees being food insecure, too," she said.

"There was a lot of attention nationally during Covid, rightly so, but sadly things haven't changed and unfortunately are trending worse right now, especially with all the inflation," Ms. Osborne said.

Those long lines at food banks at the start of the pandemic, and the cataclysm for everyone all at once, may have also done something to shake off some of the persistent stigma around emergency food systems.

"I thought it would be a whole bunch of off-brand foods or prepared meals," said Antazha Boysaw, 24, a certified nursing assistant at a retirement home in the Hartford, Conn., area. Instead, the mother of two young children found her local food pantries offering squash, shrimp and brown rice.

"You can eat luxury meals from the food pantry," Ms. Boysaw said. "It's not like you're going to get the bare minimum of the leftover, expired things."

She started going to a food pantry in 2021 after she learned that her income was too high to qualify for SNAP benefits, sometimes called food stamps, yet she still needed assistance to feed her children.

"I had my hat on, a big sweater — I didn't want anyone to see me," she said of the first time she went to a food pantry.

Now, as inflation continues to drive up prices, she has come to rely on food assistance for healthy meals — and is encouraging others in need to seek help, too.

Ms. Boysaw began posting [TikTok videos](#) about her positive experience. She would tell a friend: "Do not be afraid, girl — get your food! Make sure you go with your ID."

Other first-time pantry-goers made it through the height of pandemic shutdowns without needing this kind of assistance, but are finding inflation harder to navigate. Iliana Lebron-Cruz, 44, a health coach who also works for a dog retreat, lives an hour west of Seattle with her husband, a supervisor at Costco, and their three children. They have a combined household income of around \$120,000. "We live pretty much paycheck to paycheck," she said.

Recently, Ms. Lebron-Cruz found herself looking up options for free food in her area after she unexpectedly spent hundreds of dollars traveling to Oregon after a family emergency.

When she got back home after that trip, she looked at her empty fridge. "I get paid Thursday. It's Tuesday. I don't have it," she said she had realized. She called a food pantry.

"If something pops up with the way inflation is, it's kind of like a double whammy," she said. "Six months ago, had the same thing occurred, it wouldn't have been as bad," she said.

	<p>As Ms. Lebron-Cruz put it on a TikTok video that has been viewed more than 390,000 times: “Break the stigma — no need to be embarrassed friends!!!!” She said she had received some negative responses to the video, but had also heard from moms who were in need.</p> <p>“I’m like, absolutely, go feed your babies,” she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Summer gas demand drops
SOURCE	https://finance.yahoo.com/news/summer-gasoline-demand-us-drops-154329656.html
GIST	<p>(Bloomberg) -- Americans are officially driving less than they did in the summer of 2020, when pandemic travel restrictions all but halted movement.</p> <p>The four-week average of US gasoline consumption -- the best gauge for the country’s demand -- is now more than 1 million barrels a day below pre-Covid seasonal norms, according to Energy Information Administration data.</p> <p>The drop suggests the glimmer of demand recovery seen last week was fleeting: Though pump prices have fallen for 50 straight days, it’s not enough to lure drivers back to the road with historic inflation constraining consumer budgets.</p> <p>The dip in demand caused gasoline futures to plunge as much as 11% in New York Wednesday. While that should pull retail prices even lower, the relief at the pump may come too late as the summer driving season nears its end.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Texas power grid faces test amid heat
SOURCE	https://finance.yahoo.com/news/texas-power-grid-facing-test-154938968.html
GIST	<p>(Bloomberg) -- Intensifying Texas heat is poised to test the power grid on Thursday with demand seen topping 80 gigawatts for the first time ever.</p> <p>Ample winds twirling turbines are expected to bolster electricity supplies, reducing the threat of outages as homeowners and businesses crank up air conditioners across the second-largest US state, according to data from the Electric Reliability Council of Texas Inc.</p> <p>Electricity use on the grid serving more than 26 million customers is expected to peak at more than 81.4 gigawatts on Thursday afternoon, which would set a record for the 12th time in less than two months, according to data from Ercot, as the grid operator is known. The current record of 79.8 gigawatts was set on July 20.</p> <p>During the peak-demand hour on Thursday, wind and other renewables will provide 22% of power supplies, Ercot figures showed. Day-ahead electricity prices in the Dallas area soared 145% to as much as \$400 a megawatt-hour for Thursday afternoon.</p> <p>Despite assurances of sufficient power supplies, some industry participants are worried that aging generation plants that burn natural gas or coal are growing more vulnerable to breakdowns because they’ve been running so hard in response to Ercot’s push to maintain around-the-clock reserves.</p> <p>“The fleet continues to be run at unprecedented levels,” said Michele Richmond, executive director of Texas Competitive Power Advocates, a generator trade group. With Ercot’s move to keep more reserves online, “power-plant owners will remain concerned about the increasing and ever-present stress on the fleet.”</p> <p>Temperatures are set to soar for another day across much of Texas. The high in Dallas is forecast to reach 103 degrees Fahrenheit (39 Celsius) Wednesday and Thursday and remain above 100 for the rest of the week, according to the National Weather Service. With humidity added in, it will feel much hotter. Austin is forecast to reach 104 Wednesday, while San Antonio comes in at 102.</p>

	At Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, high temperatures have reached 100 or more 29 times since July 1, according to the weather service.
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HEADLINE	08/03 Election officials plead for more protection
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/election-officials-plead-for-more-protection-from-threats-harassment-11659531602
GIST	<p>Election officials are imploring law enforcement to take more action in response to threats and harassment against them ahead of the November midterms.</p> <p>Most of the menacing communications have come from people angry about President Biden’s 2020 victory over former President Donald Trump, election officials say, but others come from people accusing election officials of voter suppression or other issues.</p> <p>Those issues were the focus of a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing Wednesday, where Justice Department and Department of Homeland Security officials spoke about the federal response to election threats.</p> <p>The Justice Department launched a task force about a year ago to address threats against election officials. So far, four people have been federally charged, plus a fifth case was charged before the task force was established. The task force said it is pursuing dozens of other investigations.</p> <p>Many election officials say that isn’t enough. “A common refrain I hear from my members is that nobody is going to take this seriously until something bad happens, and we are all braced for the worst,” Amy Cohen, executive director of the nonpartisan National Association of State Election Directors, said in written testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee.</p> <p>“Until recently, this was not a field you went into thinking it could cost you your life,” Ms. Cohen added. Kenneth Polite Jr., assistant attorney general of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division, and Kim Wyman, senior election security adviser at DHS’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, testified at the hearing, along with two Democratic secretaries of state and several others.</p> <p>Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin, an Illinois Democrat, asked Ms. Wyman about doxing, the practice of releasing people’s personal information to facilitate harassment by others.</p> <p>Federal agencies have advised election officials to report any such incidents and to be mindful of what they put on the internet, said Ms. Wyman, who briefly teared up after the committee played a video of news reports about threats against election workers.</p> <p>Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, the committee’s top Republican, said it was important to combat election threats but said the Justice Department should also be tougher on violent crime.</p> <p>Mr. Polite pushed back against Mr. Grassley’s comments, saying the Justice Department is working to counter violent crime. “Today we are here to talk about one category of violent crime, but when we talk about violent crime that we’re seeing in our streets and across our country, that remains at the top of the department’s priorities,” Mr. Polite said.</p> <p>Other Republicans also offered criticisms. “The concern is whether that task force could take away other priorities,” said Sen. Mike Lee, a Utah Republican, mentioning threats against Supreme Court justices.</p> <p>One obstacle is determining whether a message meets the legal definition of a threat, especially considering First Amendment protections. The Justice Department’s task force reviewed over 1,000 reports and said that while many of the messages were hostile or abusive, only 11% met the threshold for a federal criminal investigation.</p>

That doesn't mean there are 110 investigations, however, because in many cases the same person contacted the victim multiple times, the department said.

The Justice Department has defended its efforts, saying the task force is committed to investigating reports of threats and that the task force has also provided briefings to election officials across the country.

Election officials said some hostilities were building before Mr. Biden's victory.

During the June 2020 presidential primary in Kentucky, Jefferson County, Kentucky's most populous, had decided [to open only one Election Day voting location](#). Since Kentucky had expanded early and absentee voting due to the Covid-19 pandemic, officials said a single, large polling place at the state fairgrounds would suffice.

Kentucky election officials said they received a deluge of angry and violent calls accusing them of disenfranchising voters. The hostile messages were previously reported by ProPublica.

A Nebraska man pleaded guilty in June to threatening a Colorado election official on social media, representing the first conviction for the Justice Department's task force. Travis Ford admitted to posting threats after becoming convinced that the Colorado official had mismanaged the November 2020 election. He is scheduled to be sentenced later this year and faces up to two years in prison. The official, who court documents didn't identify, was Colorado Secretary of State Jena Griswold, a Democrat, her office confirmed.

"Your security detail is far too thin and incompetent to protect you," Mr. Ford wrote in a social-media post, adding, "This world is unpredictable these days."

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HEADLINE	08/04 More torrential rains pound St Louis area
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/04/weather/st-louis-flooding-thursday/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN) Torrential rain has led to water evacuations overnight in St. Louis as the city still reels from last week's destructive floods.</p> <p>Rain pounded the region at rates of 1-3 inches per hour along with wind gusts up to 60 mph and a flash flood warning impacting more than 1 million people was in effect for several hours. The warning was lifted early Thursday for downtown St. Louis but remains in effect for the southern part of the city.</p> <p>There were early reports of stranded motorists, flooded roads, and flooded basements, according to the National Weather Service. Creeks were also rising and had exceeded levels reached last week.</p> <p>"Areas of thunderstorms with heavy rainfall will track across southeast Missouri overnight," the National Weather Service warned. "Very heavy rainfall, flash flooding, and frequent lightning are the primary threats. Do not drive through areas where water covers the road."</p> <p>A resource center that opened for victims of last week's flooding had to close early Wednesday due to the new rainstorms, according to CNN affiliate KSDK. Hundreds of families had flocked to the center for assistance, the outlet said.</p> <p>Torrential rains dumped a whopping 2 inches of rain over Crestwood, Missouri, in just 23 minutes, according to the Weather Service. Rainfall of this magnitude is in line with 50-100 year events, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Crestwood is a city on the outskirts of St. Louis.</p> <p>"Be especially cautious at night when it is harder to recognize the dangers of flooding. Be aware of your surroundings and do not drive on flooded roads," the National Weather Service warned.</p>

HEADLINE	08/04 China encircles Taiwan, fires missiles
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/04/asia/china-taiwan-military-exercises-intl-hnk-ml/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)China fired multiple missiles toward waters near northeastern and southwestern Taiwan on Thursday, the island's Defense Ministry said, as Beijing makes good on its promise that Taipei will pay a price for hosting US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.</p> <p>The Chinese military's Eastern Theater Command said in a statement that multiple missiles had been fired into the sea off the eastern part of Taiwan. It said all the missiles hit their target accurately.</p> <p>"The entire live-fire training mission has been successfully completed and the relevant air and sea area control is now lifted," the statement said.</p> <p>Earlier, the Eastern Theater Command said it had conducted long-range, live-fire training in the Taiwan Strait, state broadcaster CCTV reported, as part of planned military exercises around the island.</p> <p>Taiwan reported Chinese long-range rockets had fallen near its islands of Matsu, Wuqiu, Dongyin, which are in the Taiwan Strait, but located closer to the mainland than the main island of Taiwan.</p> <p>Chinese state media said that exercises to simulate an air and sea "blockade" around Taiwan had started Wednesday, but offered little solid evidence to back up the claim. Later Thursday, images showed military helicopters flying past Pingtan island, one of Taiwan's closest points to mainland China.</p> <p>The military posturing was a deliberate show of force after Pelosi left the island on Wednesday evening, bound for South Korea, one of the final stops on an Asia tour that ends in Japan this weekend.</p> <p>Within hours of her departure from Taipei on Wednesday, the island's Defense Ministry said China sent more than 20 fighter jets across the median line in the Taiwan Strait, the midway point between the mainland and Taiwan that Beijing says it does not recognize but usually respects.</p> <p>On Thursday, Taiwan's Defense Ministry said its military was remaining in a "normal" but wary posture, and called the live-fire drills an "irrational act" that attempted to "change the status quo."</p> <p>"We are closely monitoring enemy activities around the sea of Taiwan and that of outlying islands, and we will act appropriately," the ministry said in a statement.</p> <p>Exercises exerting pressure</p> <p>Well in advance of Pelosi's near 24-hour visit to Taiwan, China had warned her presence was not welcome. The ruling Chinese Communist Party claims the self-governed island as its own territory, despite never having controlled it.</p> <p>China issued a map showing six zones around Taiwan that would be the site of drills in coming days. But on Thursday, Taiwan's Maritime and Port Bureau said in a notice that China had added a seventh military exercise area for ships and aircraft to avoid "in the waters around eastern Taiwan."</p> <p>Chinese state media on Thursday outlined a broad range of objectives for the exercises, including strikes on land and sea targets.</p> <p>"The exercises (are) focused on key training sessions including joint blockade, sea target assault, strike on ground targets, and airspace control operation, and the joint combat capabilities of the troops got tested in the military operations," said an announcement from the Xinhua news agency attributed to the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) Eastern Theater Command, which has responsibility for the areas near Taiwan.</p>

Meanwhile, the Global Times tabloid said the drills involved some of China's newest and most sophisticated weaponry, including J-20 stealth fighters and DF-17 hypersonic missiles, and that some missiles may be fired over the island -- a move that would be extremely provocative.

"The exercises are unprecedented as the PLA conventional missiles are expected to fly over the island of Taiwan for the first time," the Global Times said, citing experts.

"The PLA forces will enter areas within 12 nautical miles of the island and the so-called median line will cease to exist."

Accounts from Taiwan of Chinese military movement included the fighter jets crossing the median line and a report from Taiwan's government-run Central News Agency, citing government sources, that two of China's most powerful warships -- Type 55 destroyers -- were sighted Tuesday off the central and southeastern coast of the island, the closest being within 37 miles (60 kilometers) of land.

But there was little corroboration or firm evidence provided by China to back up the sort of claims posted in the Global Times.

China's state-run television offered video of fighter jets taking off, ships at sea and missiles on the move, but the dates of when that video was shot could not be verified.

Some analysts were skeptical Beijing could pull off what they were threatening, such as a blockade of Taiwan.

"The official announcement (of the blockade) refers to just a few days, which would make it hard to qualify it on practical terms to a blockade," said Alessio Patalano, professor of war and strategy at King's College in London.

"Blockades are hard to execute and long to implement. This exercise is not that," he said.

Patalano said the biggest impact of the exercises would be psychological.

"During the period of time in question, ships and aircraft will likely reroute to avoid the area, but this is one primary objective of the chosen locations: create disruption, discomfort, and fear of worse to come," he said.

Rerouting planes and ships

China's retaliatory exercises have already caused disruption to flight and ship schedules in Taiwan, though the island is trying to lessen their impact.

Taiwan's transportation minister said agreements had been reached with Japan and the Philippines to reroute 18 international flight routes departing from the island -- affecting about 300 flights in total -- to avoid the PLA's live-fire drills.

Korean Air told CNN on Thursday that it has canceled flights from Incheon to Taiwan scheduled for Friday and Saturday due to safety reasons while China conducts its military drills. Flights will resume on Sunday.

On Wednesday, Taiwan's Maritime and Port Bureau issued three notices, asking vessels to use alternative routes for seven ports around the island.

China's planned live-fire drills were also causing unease in Japan.

Japan's chief cabinet secretary, Hirokazu Matsuno, said the drills posed a threat to his country's security.

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HEADLINE	08/03 UN to investigate deadly prison attack
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/04/un-to-investigate-prison-attack-that-killed-dozens-of-ukraine-prisoners-of-war
GIST	<p>The UN is setting up a fact-finding mission to investigate the killing of dozens of prisoners of war at a prison in a Russian-occupied region of eastern Ukraine that Moscow and Kyiv accuse each other of carrying out.</p> <p>António Guterres, the UN secretary general, told reporters he did not have authority to conduct criminal investigations but could conduct fact-finding missions, and terms of reference were being prepared for the governments of Ukraine and Russia to approve. The mission was set up in response to requests from Russia and Ukraine.</p> <p>Russia claimed that Ukraine's military used US-supplied rocket launchers to strike the prison in Olenivka, a settlement controlled by Russian-backed separatists. The attack killed 53 Ukrainian PoWs and wounded another 75, separatist authorities and Russian officials said.</p> <p>The Ukrainian military denied carrying out any rocket or artillery strikes in Olenivka. The intelligence arm of the Ukrainian defence ministry claimed in a statement on Wednesday to have evidence that local Kremlin-backed separatists colluded with the Russian FSB, the KGB's main successor agency, and mercenary group Wagner to mine the barrack before "using a flammable substance, which led to the rapid spread of fire in the room".</p> <p>The Ukrainian military on Tuesday likewise claimed that the barrack had been blown up from the inside, citing the nature of damage which it said was inconsistent with Russian claims that Ukraine had shelled the building. It was not immediately possible to verify these claims.</p> <p>The US, meanwhile, believes Russia is preparing to fabricate evidence pointing the finger at Ukraine.</p> <p>A US intelligence official told the Associated Press that recently downgraded classified material showed that Russian officials might plant ammunition from medium-ranged high mobility artillery rocket systems, or Himars, as evidence that the systems provided by the US to Ukraine were used in the attack.</p>

Guterres said he took the requests from Russia and Ukraine for a UN investigation of last Friday's attack "very seriously" and expressed hope that both countries would agree to the terms of reference. At the same time, he said, the UN was looking for "competent, independent people" to take part in the mission.

The UN chief also expressed hope the warring countries would facilitate the mission's access and provide the data required "to clarify the truth about what happened".

The Ukrainian PoWS at the Donetsk prison included troops captured during the fall of Mariupol. They spent months holed up with civilians at the giant Azovstal steel mill in the strategically important southern port city. Their resistance during a relentless Russian bombardment became a symbol of Ukrainian defiance against Russia's aggression.

More than 2,400 soldiers from the Azov regiment of the Ukrainian national guard and other military units surrendered under orders from Ukraine's military in May.

Scores of Ukrainian soldiers have been taken to prisons in Russian-controlled areas. Some have returned to Ukraine as part of prisoner exchanges with Russia, but other families have no idea whether their loved ones are still alive, or if they will ever come home.

Ukraine's defence ministry claimed on Wednesday that Ukrainian captives at the prison had been subject to "bullying, physical humiliation, and psychological demoralisation" in an attempt to coerce them into starring in pro-Russian propaganda videos.

"Ukrainian prisoners showed exceptional courage and invincible willpower," the ministry said, alleging that Moscow and the separatists did not intend to include the captives in an exchange, and opted to "deliberately destroy" them, in order to hide signs of torture which could serve as evidence in international criminal proceedings. It did not immediately disclose how it had arrived at this assessment.

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HEADLINE	08/04 Day 162 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/04/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-162-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The UN is conducting a fact-finding mission in response to requests from both Russia and Ukraine after 53 Ukrainian prisoners of war were killed in an explosion at a barracks in separatist-controlled Olenivka. The warring nations have accused each other of carrying out the attack. Ukraine claims it was a special operation plotted in advance by the Kremlin, and carried out by Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group. Russia's defence ministry, however, claims the Ukrainian military used US-supplied rockets to strike the prison.• Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, wants to talk directly to China's leader, Xi Jinping, in the hope China can use its influence with Russia to bring the war to an end. According to a report in the South China Morning Post Zelenskyy said: "It's a very powerful state. It's a powerful economy. So (it) can politically, economically influence Russia. And China is [also a] permanent member of the UN security council." So far, China has refused to condemn Russia's invasion and its president, Xi Jinping, told Putin it would support Russia's "sovereignty and security".• The US Senate has ratified Finland and Sweden's accession to Nato, voting 95-1 in support. The US is the 23rd member state to ratify what would be the most significant expansion of the 30-member alliance since the 1990s as it responds to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "This historic vote sends an important signal of the sustained, bipartisan US commitment to Nato, and to ensuring our alliance is prepared to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow," the president, Joe Biden, said in a statement. All 30 Nato members must ratify the accession before Finland and Sweden can become members.• Ukraine is pulling out its 40 peacekeepers from the Nato-led mission in Kosovo, which totals 3,800 members, according to Ukraine news. In March, Zelenskyy issued a decree for all missions to return to Ukraine to support the war.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Russian official in Ukraine has claimed Ukrainian forces are using western arms to attack the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. Europe's largest nuclear plant is now controlled by Russian forces and being used as a military base, according to Reuters. However, US secretary of state Antony Blinken said Ukrainian forces are not firing against Russian forces "lest there be a terrible accident involving the nuclear plant". Reuters was unable to verify battlefield accounts from either side of the war. • The first shipment of grain to leave Ukraine under a deal to ease Russia's naval blockade has reached Turkey. The Sierra Leone-registered ship Razoni set sail from Odesa port for Lebanon on Monday under an accord brokered by Turkey and the UN. The ship has been inspected by members of the joint coordination centre, and is now expected to move through the Bosphorus Strait "shortly". • The Ukrainian president has dismissed the importance of the first grain export shipment from his country since Russia invaded, saying it was carrying a fraction of the crop Kyiv must sell to help salvage its shattered economy. In downbeat comments, Zelenskiy, via video to students in Australia on Wednesday, said more time was needed to see whether other grain shipments would follow. • The UN has said that there have been over 10m border crossings into and out of Ukraine since Russia launched its invasion of the country on 24 February. Data gathered by the UNHCR states that 6,180,345 individual refugees from Ukraine are now recorded across Europe. Ukraine's neighbours have taken the largest individual numbers. Poland has 1.25 million refugees. • The former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder has come under fire for a private meeting held with the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin, after he travelled on holiday to Moscow to meet him. Schröder told German media in a lengthy interview he had nothing to apologise for over his friendship with Putin, whom he met last week during a visit to the Russian capital. • German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, has insisted that Russia had no reason to hold up the return of a gas turbine for the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline. The turbine is stranded in Germany, following servicing in Canada, in an escalating standoff that has seen flows to Europe fall to a trickle, just 20% of capacity.
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HEADLINE	08/03 Colleges pare Covid precautions for fall
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/colleges-scale-back-covid-precautions-for-fall-saying-pandemic-phase-over-11659519003?mod=hp_listb_pos4
GIST	<p>Colleges this fall are no longer treating Covid-19 as an emergency upending their operations, shifting to eliminate mask requirements and mandatory coronavirus testing and letting students who contract the virus isolate in their dorms with their roommates.</p> <p>With easy access to vaccinations and low hospitalization rates among college-aged adults—even during the latest surge in BA.5 subvariant cases—administrators said it is time to lift or at least rethink restrictions and redefine the virus as endemic, not a pandemic. That means scaling back mass testing, removing bans on large indoor gatherings and preparing for a fall term that more closely resembles life before Covid.</p> <p>Another issue driving the decisions is exhaustion, according to public-health experts and academics on several campuses. Students and staff have been subjected to two years of daily health checks, weekly trots to a testing center and a roller coaster of mask protocols.</p> <p>"It really comes down to a change in mind-set," said Ken Henderson, who was co-chair of Northeastern University's Covid-management operations until the group disbanded in January. Citing clinical therapies and the reduced severity of current variants, he said, "We've pivoted significantly to more living with the virus."</p> <p>The U.S. seven-day moving average for new Covid-19 cases has topped 100,000 for more than a month, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and stood at 114,000 as of July 31.</p>

Public health officials say actual case numbers are likely higher, since many who take at-home tests don't officially report their positive results. Hospitalization numbers [have been ticking upward](#) since the spring.

The CDC [varies its masking guidance](#) depending on the level of community spread in a particular area, with those in high-spread areas encouraged to wear masks indoors regardless of their vaccine status. Case rates are particularly high now across much of the south and in California.

Northeastern is mandating vaccines and boosters for the fall, but already eliminated indoor mask mandates and surveillance testing and no longer offers dedicated isolation space for infected students.

"Campuses are moving in the direction of pretending Covid is no longer an issue," said Chris Marsicano, an assistant professor of educational studies at Davidson College who has been tracking colleges' responses to Covid since early 2020. "When there's a flare-up, treat the flare-up. Don't have restrictions all the time."

That should be fine for most students and staff who are vaccinated and not immunocompromised, said A. David Paltiel, a professor at the Yale School of Public Health. But "indifference to off-campus transmission and transmission to more vulnerable members of the community is a little bit heartbreaking." Schools said they could still reverse course if variants lead to more-severe illness or local health officials recommend changes.

One of the biggest changes schools are making is dropping surveillance testing of asymptomatic students and staff, and, with that shift, abandoning online dashboards that tracked cases and positivity rates the past two years.

The College of Charleston in South Carolina isn't requiring students to show negative Covid-19 tests upon arrival this fall, said Alicia Caudill, executive vice president for student affairs. The school did require entry testing last year. She said the college will have thousands of at-home tests and KN-95 masks for students who want them.

"You have to make the best decisions for yourself," rather than relying on blanket policies from the school, Ms. Caudill said.

Georgia Institute of Technology did away with asymptomatic surveillance testing in July and instead will study wastewater to try to detect large outbreaks.

Dr. Paltiel said that approach makes sense, given how quickly the latest Omicron subvariants seem to be spreading, and how virulent future strains might be.

"You're sounding like the generals who are always getting ready to fight the previous war," he said of schools sticking with old approaches, like mandatory weekly testing.

Most schools are maintaining vaccine mandates, but some are adjusting who is covered by the rules or exactly what counts as being vaccinated.

The board of trustees at San Joaquin Delta College in California voted last month to remove vaccine and booster requirements for students.

"We're trying to be flexible while recognizing that we really do need to provide in-person services," said spokesman Alex Breitler, adding that unvaccinated students previously couldn't participate in hands-on programs.

The State University of New York's Orange County Community College [isn't mandating boosters this fall](#), while the San Diego Community College District no longer requires vaccines for students. The district [maintains a mask mandate](#).

Schools are often issuing guidance that students who test positive for Covid isolate in place, meaning they lock down in their dorms, even with uninfected roommates, rather than moving to other designated housing while contagious.

In its guidance for the fall, Cornell University recommended that students who test positive “wear a high-quality mask at all times except when eating, sleeping or using bathroom facilities (e.g., showering, brushing teeth).”

University of California, Irvine, set aside 166 beds for isolation housing this fall, down from 362 in the spring. David Souleles, director of the school’s Covid-19 response team, said that is partly in response to updated guidance from public-health officials. Cutting isolation beds will also free up more beds for the general student population in the midst of a [housing crunch](#).

Leslie Bienen, a public-health researcher at Oregon Health and Science University-Portland State University School of Public Health, said that by the time one roommate tests positive for Covid, chances are anyone else they lived with was already exposed.

Moving students into separate housing, she said, “is kind of closing the barn door after the horse is gone.” As in-person classes once again become the norm, schools are scaling back their online and hybrid offerings—including for students who fall ill.

Georgia Tech, for instance, said instructors should be flexible with Covid-positive students who have to isolate or quarantine, as they would if students were sick before the pandemic. “The method or approach to providing content and makeup work for the students is at the instructor’s discretion,” the school said.

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HEADLINE	08/04 Russia to annex occupied Ukraine areas
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/08/04/russia-annexation-ukraine/
GIST	<p>Russia’s vow to annex pockets of occupied Ukraine has presented the United States and its partners with a pressing dilemma, as trepidation grows in Washington and Kyiv over whether the West is positioned to avert a pivotal shift in the war.</p> <p>Russian leaders have signaled they could hold votes in the country’s east and south on Sept. 11, alongside regional elections already scheduled to take place. And while Secretary of State Antony Blinken and senior White House officials have warned that any attempted land grab through “sham” referendums would bring “additional costs imposed upon Russia,” critics of the Biden administration’s response thus far — including some Democrats — contend that the president and his advisers appear largely unfazed by the Kremlin’s pronouncements.</p> <p>The impending deadline is raising fears that if Russia declares sovereignty over the occupied areas, it could use the ensuing months — when the pace of battlefield maneuvering is expected to slow with the arrival of fall and winter weather — to solidify its hold and leave the Ukrainians unable to wrest back what they and the West say is rightfully theirs.</p> <p>“Time is on Putin’s side,” said Rep. Michael Waltz (R-Fla.), referring to the Russian president, Vladimir Putin. Waltz in late July was part of a congressional delegation that toured the war-ravaged cities of Irpin and Bucha, and met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv. Waltz noted that in occupied areas, Moscow is already installing government offices, replacing the Ukrainian hryvnia with the Russian ruble as currency, handing out Russian passports and flooding the airwaves with pro-Kremlin media.</p> <p>“The more time [Putin] gets to put his people in place,” Waltz said, “those occupied areas become more and more a new normal, a fait accompli, of being a part of Russia.”</p>

The Russian embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment. The country's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, has said Moscow intends to protect areas "that want to determine their destiny independently."

The specter of effectively losing tens of thousands of square miles to Russia has put fresh urgency behind the Ukrainian military's attempt to stage a successful [counteroffensive](#), with near-term plans to push for retaking the southern port city of Kherson. The government in Kyiv has mounted a fervent and at times public appeal for more security assistance, with Zelensky warning that only a few weeks remain to shift [the momentum](#).

Biden administration officials insist they are exploring ways to respond to multiple contingencies, including annexation. There are, however, few signs they believe Russia asserting sovereignty over Ukrainian territory would demonstrably reshape the war — or that the threat alone should justify a dramatic escalation of military aid.

In more than a dozen interviews and briefings, officials from the White House, the State Department, the Pentagon and the U.S. intelligence community defended allied efforts to funnel weapons to Ukraine as sufficient to address Kyiv's needs. These officials downplayed the prospect that a Russian land grab would mark a significant turning point and exuded confidence that plans to continue helping Ukraine defend itself in the long term will enable Zelensky to achieve his objectives.

"If Russia makes the mistake of seeking to annex Ukrainian territory, the Ukrainian military will seek to retake that territory, and it will have the support of the United States and the international community," said Pentagon spokesman Todd Breasseale.

Yet to date, there is no indication the Biden administration intends to lift restrictions barring Ukraine from firing U.S.-provided weapons into Russian territory, even when fired upon from that side of the border, or supply the longest-range ammunition with which Ukrainian artillery crews might be able to reach such targets.

Similarly, there is no apparent rush to send Ukraine fighter jets, even though some senior U.S. officials [have said](#) that doing so is under consideration. Zelensky's advisers have been adamant that if the war is to be won, Ukraine needs more firepower — and fast.

"When we get more HIMARS and hopefully combat aircraft, this is when we will be even more efficient with our military objectives and liberating Ukraine," Yuriy Sak, an adviser to Ukrainian defense minister Oleksii Reznikov, said in an interview.

Since [Russia invaded](#) in late February, the United States has taken consistent steps to help Ukraine defend its territory, including land behind enemy lines. Earlier this year, for instance, the U.S. intelligence community changed its long-standing guidance against sharing information about the locations of Russian forces and materiel in Ukraine's occupied areas, and now provides those details to Ukrainian counterparts in real time, officials say.

The intelligence — including satellite imagery, reports from intercepted communications and insights into Russian military activities in the Crimean peninsula, which it seized in 2014 — has proven vital to Ukraine's military gains, according to officials familiar with the information sharing. Like others, they spoke on the condition of anonymity to be candid about U.S. support for the war.

But there is deep concern in some circles that while Western allies say they are with Ukraine for the long haul, their actions haven't been aggressive enough.

"We have a real deadline, and we need to meet that deadline," said Rep. Mike Quigley (D-Ill.), who was part of the congressional delegation that visited Ukraine last month. "You can't half-ass a war. You can't put Ukraine in a position where they aren't fully positioned to meet the challenge."

In Europe, whose military contributions to Ukraine have lagged behind those of the United States, there are signs a shift could be underway. The European Commission on Monday said it had [began to disburse](#) the first 1 billion euros in a 9 billion euro assistance package for Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Germany, Europe's wealthiest country, late last month approved the production of 100 self-propelled howitzers for Ukraine's army, and this week confirmed delivery of multiple-launch rocket systems to the country.

Some have pointed to these steps as an indicator of Germany's "long-term support" for Ukraine, according to Rafael Loss, a Berlin-based analyst at the European Centre on Foreign Relations. Internal debates over whether Germany should back offensive operations, such as Ukraine's bid to retake Kherson, in addition to defensive operations seem to have died down as the pace of heavy weapons deliveries has picked up.

Critics note that Berlin's military-aid budget for Ukraine is dwarfed by what it spends on energy supplies from Russia. Recent cuts, including Moscow's decision [to slash](#) the amount of gas flowing through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline, are unlikely to shift that balance in the short term, leaving Russia with potential leverage or a means to retaliate against Europe for aiding Ukraine.

Facing the potential for an even tighter squeeze, the European Union last week agreed to reduce natural gas consumption over the winter months by 15 percent, or institute cuts if that benchmark cannot be met. The E.U. sanctioned Russian oil and coal, but not its natural gas, earlier in the conflict.

Following annexation, analysts say, Russia could point to any European-backed Ukrainian counteroffensives as a pretext to further choke off energy supplies in retaliation. Such economic pressure could test the Europeans' resolve, said Sam Charap, a Russia specialist and political scientist at the RAND Corporation.

"They're talking about gas rationing in Germany," he said. "It's getting pretty serious."

Latvia's foreign minister, Edgars Rinkevics, acknowledged that annexing Ukrainian territory would force Russia to defend it at all costs. But he dismissed conjecture that Putin had the capacity to lash out beyond Ukraine, warning that Russia's resources are too beleaguered to engage in any credible fearmongering.

If the Russians "were able to be more aggressive, they would be more aggressive as we speak. Or weeks ago," Rinkevics said in an interview. "It seems they have no more capability except for the nuclear one, and it seems they cannot use it for many reasons."

Early in the conflict, Putin caused a stir by announcing that he was putting Russia's nuclear arsenal [on heightened alert](#). Western officials say the threat has yet to yield any tangible change in Russia's nuclear posture, leading to a shared sense among the United States and its allies that any threat it issues, including a threat to annex territory, could be a bluff.

Sak, the aide to Ukraine's defense minister, praised Ukraine's success thus far in wearing down Russian forces, destroying their equipment and bashing troops' morale. But Russia, he said, had committed so many atrocities and violations of international law that neither annexation nor any campaign to enforce it could be casually dismissed.

"We need to hope for the best but prepare for the worst," Sak said. "And we understand Russia only responds to force."

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HEADLINE	08/03 Covid hospitalizations quadrupled in 4mo.
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SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/science/2022/08/covid-hospitalizations-more-than-quadrupled-since-april-deaths-remain-stable/
GIST	<p>As the wave of omicron coronavirus subvariant BA.5 continues to flood the US, daily COVID-19 hospitalizations are four times higher than four months ago, according to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>The data reflects the high ongoing transmission of coronavirus subvariants adept at evading fading immune responses in a population that is largely unboosted.</p> <p>In early April, as the US fell into a brief pandemic lull in the wake of the towering BA.1 omicron wave, the seven-day rolling average for new hospitalizations sunk to around 1,420 per day nationwide. Now, after waves of subvariants BA. 2, BA.2.12.1, and the current BA.5, hospitalizations have floated back up. The current seven-day rolling average is nearing 6,300. Overall, more than 37,000 people in the US are currently hospitalized with COVID-19.</p> <p>Fortunately, deaths have not risen as a result of increased hospitalizations. The average number of daily deaths is around 375 per day, according to the CDC.</p> <p>But SARS-CoV-2 transmission and the burden of COVID-19 remains high in much of the country, allowing for more disease, hospitalization, and opportunities to generate new variants and subvariants.</p> <p>According to the CDC's community transmission data, 94 percent of US counties have high transmission levels, and an additional 3 percent have substantial levels. In terms of the CDC's COVID-19 community levels metric, which account for local hospital capacity and usage as well as transmission, 46 percent of counties have high community levels. That means people should mask in indoor public settings, according to the CDC. An additional 35 percent of counties have medium community levels.</p> <p>Americans have largely abandoned COVID-19 mitigation efforts, despite the continued high transmission levels and masking recommendations. Vaccination and booster rates also remain low. Nearly 33 percent of Americans have not received the two doses of vaccine to be considered fully vaccinated. About 67.5 percent have not received a single booster dose needed to be considered up to date on their vaccination.</p> <p>In a radio interview Tuesday, top infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci called the figures "quite discouraging." He warned Americans that "if they don't get vaccinated or they don't get boosted, they're going to get into trouble."</p> <p>BA.5, the subvariant with the largest growth advantage to date over other versions of SARS-CoV-2, continues to increase its dominance in the US. It now accounts for an estimated 85 percent of all infections, up from 81 percent at the end of July.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/02 Wildfire season will get more dangerous
SOURCE	https://time.com/6202951/california-wildfires-mckinney-2022/
GIST	<p>The McKinney Fire in far northern California has so far burned more than 55,000 acres—an area more than one and a half times the size of San Francisco—making it the largest wildfire in the state so far this year. The fire has been blamed for the deaths of two people who were found Sunday in a burned out vehicle.</p> <p>The McKinney Fire, along with the 19,000-acre Oak Fire near Yosemite National Park, show that the California wildfire season is ramping up once again. A heat wave across the Pacific Northwest and years of drought that have resulted in very dry fuel in forests—both of which experts say are made worse by climate change—are creating conditions for bigger, more frequent, and more unpredictable fires across California this year.</p>

There are currently 60 active large wildfires burning across 14 states nationwide—engulfing about 1.6 million acres, according to the [National Interagency Fire Center \(NIFC\)](#). More than 5.7 million acres have been burned so far this year—more than 85% higher than at this point last year, and more than at this point in any year since 2015.

Here's what you need to know about California's wildfires so far this year.

What we know about the McKinney fire so far

The McKinney Fire began to burn in the Klamath National Forest in Siskiyou County on July 29. There are now about 1,400 personnel working on the ground, [according to fire officials](#). Firefighters initially believed the fire had begun to subside, but its magnitude significantly increased around midnight on Saturday as thunderstorms and dry fuel pushed the fire north toward the Oregon state line.

On July 30, California Gov. Gavin Newsom [declared](#) a state of emergency for the county, opening access to additional resources, including increased emergency response. Nearly 2,000 residents have been forced to evacuate their homes. The National Weather Service issued a red flag warning through Tuesday, which advised residents that lightning and strong winds could result in extreme fire behavior. More than 4,500 buildings are under threat from the McKinney Fire.

The Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office [confirmed](#) that two people have died after their bodies were found inside a burned vehicle in the path of the McKinney fire west of Klamath River, Calif.

Authorities have not yet determined what started the fire, but experts say the big-picture cause of the large blaze is clear. A multi-year drought, high temperatures, low moisture levels in the fuel sources, dry vegetation, and wind all contributed to dramatically increase the risk of wildfire, says Noah Diffenbaugh, Senior Fellow at the Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment.

Rainfall helped keep the McKinney Fire's growth minimal on Monday, and authorities [say](#) the edges of the fire haven't spread on Monday or Tuesday due to cooler temperature and cloudy skies. Firefighters are still working to prevent the fire from impacting Yreka and Fort Jones, two nearby towns.

The fire remained 0% contained as of Tuesday morning.

This year's dangerous wildfire season

The NIFC [reports](#) that there have been more than 5.7 million acres burned so far this year, with more than 39,000 fires recorded. That's more than the area burned in all of 2019. And the number of fires is sure to increase—mirroring the upward trend [seen](#) in years including 2015, 2017 and 2020, when more than 10 million acres were engulfed by wildfires.

California is especially at risk. Its wildfire seasons are typically much longer than other states in the West, according to LeRoy Westerling, the director of the Center for Climate Communication at University of California, Merced. "Compared to what we historically thought of as normal, the risks are much higher than they used to be," Westerling says. "We have warmer temperatures which means more evaporation and that dries up fuels to make them more flammable, and it also makes earlier snow melt at higher elevations, so that can push the start of a fire season earlier."

An analysis of California's current wildfire season by [Cal Fire found that](#) the state has continued to experience conditions that make wildfires more likely. Minimal precipitation caused moderate to extreme drought conditions even before the summer began, keeping fuel moisture levels low—increasing flammability—which in turn affects the frequency, severity, and size of forest fires, according to Westerling.

Since the McKinney Fire began to burn, there have already been six other fires reported in the state—three of them in the same county. These fires remain small, but are at risk of growing.

Why more wildfires are likely to happen

	<p>While wildfires are a natural part of California’s ecology, the current frequency and size of the fires is a recent development, which researchers believe is due to conditions created by climate change.</p> <p>Nine of the ten largest California wildfires occurred within the last five years, and research has suggested that climate change has doubled the number of large fires between 1984 and 2018 in the West. Globally, the likelihood of catastrophic wildfires occurring could increase by 30% by 2050, according to a United Nations report released this February.</p> <p>Westerling, who is currently working on California’s latest State Climate Assessment, which analyzes future climate risks and identifies solutions, says the state is working on strategies to reduce the damage from wildfires in the future. These include thinning forests and prescribed burning—the practice of deliberately starting controlled fires to help reduce wood and vegetation and promote the healthy growth of forests.</p> <p>But these strategies alone won’t be enough to stop uncontrolled wildfires, warns Westerling. “The more extreme climate change gets the harder it gets to adapt,” he says. “So we have to do both — adapt and mitigate future climate change.”</p>
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HEADLINE	08/04 Influx from Ukraine strains Europe
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/04/business/economy/ukraine-refugees-estonia.html
GIST	<p>The duty-free shop on Deck 7 of the Isabelle has been turned into a storage locker and pantry, with suitcases heaped in the perfume section and refrigerated display cases crammed with labeled grocery bags. The ship’s shuttered casino has become the go-to hangout for teenagers. And the Starlight Palace nightclub on Deck 8 is where women meet to make camouflage nets for Ukrainian soldiers back home.</p> <p>“It makes me feel closer to them,” Diana Kotsenko said as she tied green, brown and maroon cloth strips onto a net strung across a metal frame, her 2-year old, Emiliia, tugging at her knees.</p> <p>For the past three months, Ms. Kotsenko and her daughter have been living on the Isabelle, a 561-foot cruise ship leased by the Estonian government to temporarily house some of the more than 48,000 refugees who have arrived in this small Baltic nation since the Russians invaded Ukraine in February.</p> <p>The ship, which once ferried overnight passengers between Stockholm and Riga, Latvia, is now berthed next to Terminal A in the port city of Tallinn, Estonia’s capital. Its 664 cabins house roughly 1,900 people — most of them women and children who come and go as they please through the ship’s cavernous cargo door.</p> <p>The residents are a tiny fraction of the more than 6.3 million Ukrainians who have streamed into Europe. Their lot is a sign of the strains that the flood of refugees is having on countries that have mostly welcomed them.</p> <p>Isabelle was leased from an Estonian shipping company, Tallink, in April for four months as an emergency shelter. But with nowhere else to put its residents, the government has extended the contract through October.</p> <p>The shortage of homes for refugees is creating intense pressure across the continent and Britain. Low-cost housing is scarce, and rents are rising.</p> <p>In Scotland, the government announced last month that it was pausing its program to sponsor Ukrainian refugees because of the lack of accommodations. In the Netherlands, scores of refugees have been sleeping on the grass outside an overcrowded asylum center in the village of Ter Apel. On Monday, the Dutch Council for Refugees announced plans to sue the government over shelter conditions that it said fell below the minimum legal standard.</p>

Of all the challenges facing Ukrainians who escaped to safe havens, the most pressing is access to housing, according to a new report from the [Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation](#). The problem of finding longer-term accommodation is expected to only worsen given rising inflation, the report concluded.

“Early evidence also suggests that a lack of housing is a primary motivation for refugees to return to Ukraine, in spite of safety risks,” it said.

Governments — which were already struggling to house refugees and asylum seekers from other parts of the world — have set up emergency intake facilities, rented hotels and provided financial support to host households. But with reception centers overflowing, countries have been forced to scramble for other solutions. Schools, hostels, sports stadiums, cargo containers, tents and even cruise ships have become stopgap accommodations.

In Estonia, the government enlisted Tallink, which had leased out its ships in the past as temporary housing for construction projects, military personnel and events. One housed police officers during a Group of 7 meeting in Britain last year. Another was chartered during the global climate conference in Glasgow last fall.

The Scottish government turned to Tallink when it faced its own refugee housing crisis, and last week, the first group of Ukrainians [moved into a Tallink ship](#) docked in Edinburgh’s port.

The Netherlands, too, is using cruise ships. In April, 1,500 refugees moved into a Holland America Line vessel docked in Rotterdam. Last week, the government’s asylum agency announced that it planned to [charter two additional vessels](#) from Tallink for seven months.

The floating solutions have been greeted with skepticism or even hostility in some quarters. Before the Tallink ship arrived in Scotland, some [news accounts](#) breathlessly warned of the risks of a Covid-19 outbreak.

The Dutch government came under scorching criticism for a [now-abandoned proposal](#) to put refugees on a ship anchored off the coast in open water, making it difficult for people to come ashore.

In Tallinn, the Isabelle had been out of service because of travel restrictions since the pandemic began in 2020 before it was put to use for the refugees. Natalie Shevchenko has lived on it since April. She has searched for an apartment in town but hasn’t been able to find one she can afford.

A psychologist from Kyiv, Ms. Shevchenko has been working with mothers and children onboard, helping them adjust.

“When you live on a ship, it’s like a big community,” she said.

On a recent evening, a steady flow of people entered or left the ship after a brief pause at the security desk to scan their identification cards. On Deck 8, diners lingered over coffee in the Grand Buffet. “The food is good,” Ms. Shevchenko said. “There’s a lot of desserts, cakes and ice cream.”

In a lounge area, a dozen people sat in front of a television set watching the news from Ukraine. Cliques of chattering teenagers roamed the long decks or sprawled on chairs near the casino’s empty blackjack tables. Two floors below, near the staircase where strollers were parked, children spread out on the blue and white carpet to play games, while two giggling boys slid down a short brass banister under the watchful eyes of mothers.

Volunteers have donated toys, clothes and baby carriages, and have organized activities and excursions. On Deck 10, refugees can meet with social service workers. Bulletin boards around the ship were filled with announcements in Ukrainian about summer camp, free exhibitions, and language and culture courses.

The newly named Freedom School is scheduled to start classes in Ukrainian and Estonian in the fall. Players from an Estonian soccer club came on board last weekend to lead a practice clinic.

When Ms. Shevchenko needs solitude, she escapes to one of the lower car decks. She shares a claustrophobic sixth-floor cabin and bathroom with another woman she did not previously know. The space between the beds is narrower than an airplane aisle. Bags, shoes and boxes are stuffed under the beds. A white rope crisscrosses the walls to hang laundry.

“Here’s our kitchen,” Ms. Shevchenko said, pointing with a laugh to a shelf with bottles of water and soda. A flowerpot, a gift for her recent 34th birthday from the Estonian psychologists she works with, sits on the windowsill.

“We’re lucky to have a window,” she said. Some cabins on lower decks don’t have one. It’s a problem for people who had to shelter underground in Ukraine, she said: “Some people have panic attacks.”

A few doors down is the cabin that Olga Vasilieva and her 6-year-old son share with another mother and son. The two women use the unfolded upper bunk beds to store toys, bags and snacks, and sleep with their children in the narrow beds below. Bigger cabins are reserved for families with three or more children.

One of the benefits of living with so many other families is that there are lots of children to play with. “He has so many friends,” Ms. Vasilieva said, turning to Ms. Shevchenko to translate.

Ms. Vasilieva wants to return home before the school year starts, but so far, it hasn’t been safe. Although she had two jobs in Ukraine, Ms. Vasilieva said, she doesn’t work now because she has no one to care for her son. She said she received roughly 400 euros a month from the Estonian government. About a hundred of the refugees work for Tallink, in kitchen and housekeeping positions. Others have found jobs in town.

Inna Aristova, 54, and her husband, Hryhorii Akinzhely, 64, who arrived in May after a hard trek from Melitopol, work in a laundry sorting sheets and towels. They haven’t been able to find an affordable apartment.

“I feel like a guest in this country,” Ms. Aristova said, “not home.”

Tears filled her eyes. Her most acute anxieties center on her 21-year-old son, who is in the army. She doesn’t know where he is, a security precaution, but they try to text or speak as often as possible.

“He is so young,” she said. “Every day I am thinking about him.” Ms. Shevchenko, who was translating, bent down to hug her.

In the Starlight Palace, Ms. Kotsenko and a handful of mothers and teenagers worked on the camouflage nets, cutting strips of cloth and attaching them. When finished, the cover will be sent to the Kherson region in southeastern Ukraine to hide tanks from Russian bombers.

Ms. Kotsenko also doesn’t know where her husband is stationed in Ukraine. She and her daughter escaped from the embattled city of Mykolaiv.

Another woman from the same city pulled out her phone to show Mykolaiv on a map. An animated red burst marked the spot, indicating heavy fighting.

She had just received a long text from her neighbor with a series of photos showing bloody corpses of people and dogs lying on the streets, killed by Russian shells that morning.

Some of the women Ms. Shevchenko has counseled have told her that they have decided to return to Ukraine. But, she said, what “you dream about your home” may not match the reality.

HEADLINE	08/03 Senate votes: add Sweden, Finland to NATO
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/03/us/politics/sweden-finland-nato-senate-vote.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Senate on Wednesday overwhelmingly approved a treaty that would expand NATO to include Finland and Sweden, with Republicans and Democrats linking arms to pave the way for one of the most significant expansions of the alliance in decades amid Russia’s continued assault on Ukraine.</p> <p>The vote was 95 to 1, with only Senator Josh Hawley, Republican of Missouri, opposing the move. The lopsided tally, far surpassing the two-thirds support necessary to approve a treaty, underscored the bipartisan appetite for a more muscular Western military alliance even amid threats from Russian officials that Sweden and Finland would face retaliation should they join NATO.</p> <p>“Finland’s and Sweden’s membership will strengthen NATO even further, and is all the more urgent given Russian aggression, given Putin’s immoral and unjustified war in Ukraine,” said Senator Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York and the majority leader. “Putin is strengthening the NATO alliance, and nothing shows it better” than the Senate’s resounding approval of the pact.</p> <p>All 30 current members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization must ratify the accession of the two countries. Twenty-two countries have already done so, but as recently as two weeks ago, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey was threatening to block Finland and Sweden’s membership bids, which would prolong the process.</p> <p>Still, the approval of the United States is a crucial step, and the vote was a triumph for President Biden. It was a vindication of his push to rally Western allies to confront Mr. Putin’s brutal campaign in Ukraine and a step toward fulfilling his pledge as a presidential candidate to restore the alliances frayed badly during the Trump era and reassert the role of the United States in protecting democracy around the world.</p> <p>“This historic vote sends an important signal of the sustained, bipartisan U.S. commitment to NATO, and to ensuring our alliance is prepared to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow,” Mr. Biden said in a statement, adding that he looked forward to welcoming “two strong democracies with highly capable militaries, into the greatest defensive alliance in history.”</p> <p>Democrats argued that adding Sweden and Finland to NATO would reduce the burden on the United States and the broader alliance.</p> <p>“More than ever, it is crystal clear that NATO plays a vital role for the security of the United States and as a bulwark in protecting peace and democracies throughout the world,” said Senator Bob Menendez, Democrat of New Jersey and the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee.</p> <p>“Seventy years ago, democratic nations of Europe and the United States came together to defend the liberty, freedom and individual rights of their citizens from the threat of a militarized Soviet Union,” Mr. Menendez continued. “Now — as then — the defensive alliance serves as a bulwark of stability and the rule of law for the people of its member states.”</p> <p>The vote margin also reflected a striking repudiation by Republicans of the “America First” philosophy espoused by President Donald J. Trump, who was openly contemptuous of NATO and of American commitments to international organizations.</p> <p>Some Republicans in the Senate have watched with alarm as a growing number of their colleagues, seeking to emulate Mr. Trump and appeal to his supporters, have taken up anti-interventionist positions at odds with their party’s traditional hawkish stance. Even while Mr. Trump occupied the White House, foreign policy was one of the few areas where Republicans dared challenge him.</p> <p>The overwhelming tally on Wednesday — with just one defection — was one of the most forceful rejections yet of that isolationist worldview. Senator Rand Paul, Republican of Kentucky, voted present.</p>

Few Republicans expressed qualms with the notion of entering a mutual defense pact with a country that shares an 800-mile border with Russia, instead arguing that doing so would strengthen the alliance.

The vote came a day after Republicans in the House rallied around Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Democrat of California — one of their most bitter political adversaries — for defying the Chinese government’s warnings and traveling to Taiwan. That support, and the resounding vote on Wednesday, were a stark contrast to the pitched battles Republicans have engaged in with Democrats on domestic policy.

It also marked the success of a concerted effort by Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky and the minority leader, who has long pushed against [the anti-interventionist strain in his party](#), but in recent months launched a particularly aggressive effort to [publicly rally support](#) for the kind of assertive military presence abroad that was once viewed as Republican orthodoxy.

Determined to show the world that Mr. Trump’s views on military aid and alliances did not hold sway over Senate Republicans, the Republican leader traveled in May to Ukraine, Sweden and Finland.

Mr. McConnell argued that both Sweden and Finland would be able to carry their share of the defense burden, in an attempt to counter a concern frequently raised by conservatives about adding to the alliance. And he had made the case to his members that “even closer cooperation” with the two nations would help the United States counter China, another argument invoked by Republicans contending that the U.S. needs to shift its defense resources away from Europe and toward Asia.

“Their accession will make NATO stronger and America more secure,” Mr. McConnell said in a speech from the Senate floor on Wednesday. “If any senator is looking for a defensible excuse to vote no, I wish them good luck.”

Only Mr. Hawley, who is widely viewed as an aspiring presidential candidate in 2024, voted against the treaty, [writing in an opinion article](#) that “NATO expansion would almost certainly mean more U.S. forces in Europe for the long haul.”

“In the face of this stark reality, we must choose,” Mr. Hawley said. “We must do less in Europe (and elsewhere) in order to prioritize China and Asia.”

The four other Republican senators who are widely assumed to harbor presidential aspirations — Ted Cruz of Texas, Tom Cotton of Arkansas, Tim Scott of South Carolina, and Marco Rubio of Florida — all voted in favor of the expansion.

Mr. Cruz, in a brief interview, called NATO “the most successful military alliance in modern history,” and said that “bringing in serious additional military capacity” would only strengthen it.

And Mr. Cotton took to the Senate floor on Wednesday afternoon ahead of the vote to deliver a point-by-point argument against the treaty’s opponents, casting them as “alarmist and backward.”

“Some critics say America shouldn’t pledge to protect countries halfway around the world,” Mr. Cotton said. “But these critics are seven decades too late. We’re already treaty-bound to defend more than two dozen nations in Europe.”

The “real question today,” he said, “is whether adding two capable and strong nations to our mutual defense pact will make us stronger or weaker.”

Only the Senate is vested with the authority to consider and approve treaties. The House last month, in a display of solidarity, passed a nonbinding resolution supporting Finland and Sweden’s accession to NATO, in a 394 to 18 vote.

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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/04/world/europe/ukraine-russia-farms-farming-wheat-barley.html
GIST	<p>ZELENODILSK, Ukraine — Their uniforms are dusty jeans and tank-tops, and they drive tractors, not tanks, along the frontline in Russia’s war in Ukraine.</p> <p>But Ukrainian farmers face many of the same grave dangers as soldiers as they reap this year’s harvest. Across Ukraine, Russian artillery and mines have killed tractor drivers. Thousands of acres of ripe wheat have burned from strikes. Fields are pockmarked where incoming shells have left craters.</p> <p>Serhiy Sokol, a wheat, barley and sunflower farmer in southern Ukraine, said he and his farmhands plucked dozens of aluminum tubes from Russian rockets from the black earth as they worked his fields. Last month, he said, a neighbor’s combine harvester ran over a mine, blowing off one of its fat tires but sparing the driver.</p> <p>“There were a lot of cluster munitions in the fields,” Mr. Sokol said with a shrug. “We just risked it, and thank God nobody was hurt.”</p> <p>And after all Mr. Sokol’s troubles, with his barley crop drying in storage, a Russian artillery shell hit his silo. A dozen or so tons of grain burned.</p> <p>The breakthrough deal that allowed ships carrying grain to depart from Ukraine’s southern ports this week may have solved a diplomatic problem, but it left a more pragmatic one hanging over Ukraine’s farming community: growing and reaping crops in a war zone, as powerful weapons rain destruction across some of the richest agricultural land in the world.</p> <p>The farmers say they have little choice. Much of Ukraine’s grain crop is winter wheat and barley, sown in early fall and harvested the following summer. After planting before the war began, farmers near the front must take risks now, lest they lose the entire year’s investment.</p> <p>Ukraine is one of the world’s largest grain exporting-nations, and its profitable agricultural industry is a cornerstone of the country’s economy, accounting for about 11 percent of gross domestic product and creating about 1 million jobs. Agriculture is even more important for export earnings, accounting for 41 percent of all Ukrainian exports last year. But the Russians had stymied Ukraine’s ability to export, blocking shipping routes in the Black Sea and, Ukraine says, stealing grain in occupied territory.</p> <p>Hopes for Ukrainian farming rose this week as the first grain ship, carrying 26,000 tons of corn, left the port of Odesa under an agreement brokered by Turkey and endorsed by the United Nations and intended to ease hunger in the developing world.</p> <p>Escorted through sea mines safeguarding the port and Russian warships farther at sea on Monday, the ship reached Turkish waters on Wednesday, where it was inspected and cleared to sail on to Lebanon. More ships will follow. The deal is expected to allow the export of about five million tons of grain per month, whittling away at a backlog of about 20 million tons of grain in silos from last year, freeing storage space for this year’s harvest.</p> <p>But planting and harvesting have become such harrowing undertakings that Ukraine will inevitably have less to export this year and into the future, given the obstacles to farming. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, for example, has forecast that Ukraine’s wheat exports, worth \$5.1 billion last year, will fall by half after this year’s harvest.</p> <p>Out in the fields along a section of the frontline where the Ukrainian Army is pressing a counteroffensive against Russian forces, sunflowers, wheat and barley crops stretch to the horizons.</p> <p>This is Ukraine’s big sky country: huge expanses of table-flat land, laid out in a checkerboard of gigantic fields.</p>

Closer to the front, chunky Ukrainian military trucks lumber along the back roads, along with tractors and combines bringing in the harvest.

Every few minutes, there is a distant thud from artillery. On the horizon, swirls of smoke blow in the wind from burning fields.

Farmers and Ukrainian soldiers say the Russian military intentionally fires at ripe wheat and barley to start fires, as a form of economic sabotage. There is random destruction as well, as Russian fire aimed at military targets also risks setting fields alight.

“They see the combines and fire at them,” said Yevhen Sytnychenko, head of the military administration in the Kryvyi Rih district, interviewed beside a burning field on a recent tour of frontline farms. “They do it so we won’t have grain, so we cannot eat and cannot export.”

Sgt. Serhiy Tarasenko, whose soldiers with the 98th infantry brigade have been fighting in farmland south of the city of Kryvyi Rih, said Russian artillery has targeted tractors and combines, which are spotted by drones.

“They are shooting at local people collecting the grain,” he said. “These are people who invested their money and now they need to harvest. But they are now doing it under fire, under attack.”

For Ukrainians, the burning fields are an emotionally laden and infuriating development even in a war with no shortage of other outrages. It recalls, said Mr. Sytnychenko, the Soviet Union’s requisitions of grain in the 1930s that caused a famine that historians say killed at least three million Ukrainians, a tragedy known as the Holodomor. “Before, they confiscated the grain, and today they burn it,” he said.

Ukraine is also facing immediate economic consequences. The Ministry of Agriculture has cited studies showing the war will cost farmers and agribusiness companies \$23 billion this year in lost profits, destroyed equipment and higher transportation costs.

Ukrainian farmers and the government have been adapting, finding workarounds to blocked transport routes, setting up temporary sites for storing grain and trying to clear mines from fields to bring in the harvest. The hardest hit crops are wheat, barley and sunflowers, as they are grown in areas near the fighting, according to the agriculture ministry.

“While Russia is blackmailing the world with hunger, we are trying to prevent a global food crisis,” President Volodymyr Zelensky said of efforts to keep Ukraine’s farms producing.

Crop fires sparked by artillery strikes are cutting into the harvest. More than 3,000 field fires have broken out, according to Olena Kryvoruchkina, a member of Parliament.

Tractors and combines have hit land mines in northern Ukraine even months after Russia retreated. Late last month, for example, a tractor struck a mine outside of Kharkiv, killing the driver. The tractor burned in the field.

Outside Mr. Sokol’s hometown in south-central Ukraine, two combines, including the John Deere operated by his neighbor, hit land mines over the last two weeks of July.

Rocket debris from Mr. Sokol’s fields now sits in a yard along with tractor tires and sacks of grain. A heap of a dozen or so slate gray, dented tubes and fins lean against a wall.

“I’m angry,” he said. “How angry? I want them to die. That’s how I feel now.”

In the fields on a recent, sweltering afternoon during the harvest, flames crackled through the stubble of the recently harvested wheat crop of Vasylii Tabachnyuk, picking up with gusts of wind.

	<p>Mr. Tabachnyuk, whose fields are just a few miles from the front, said he was fortunate to have harvested early. After previous strikes, he has sent tractor drivers into the burning fields to cut firebreaks, trying to save what grain he could. One strike burned about 200 acres of ripe wheat.</p> <p>If the Ukrainian counteroffensive does not push the Russians back before sowing season for winter wheat in September, he said, he wouldn't plant for next year.</p> <p>"All agriculture will be out of business," he said, standing in the scorched field, where the soil was blanketed in charred kernels of wheat.</p> <p>"The wheat was ripe," he said. "It should have been harvested."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 China's exercises practice to seize Taiwan
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/03/world/asia/taiwan-china-military-exercises.html
GIST	<p>A day after Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, visited Taiwan, celebrating it as a bulwark of democracy, China launched three days of military exercises around the island, which its forces may use to press in closer than ever, honing their ability to impose a blockade.</p> <p>A barrage of Chinese propaganda said the drills, which started at midday Thursday, would serve as punishment for Ms. Pelosi's visit, and as a shock-and-awe deterrent against opponents of Beijing's claims to the self-ruled island. But more than that, the six exercise zones that the People's Liberation Army has marked out in seas off Taiwan — one nudging less than 10 miles off its southern coast — could give Chinese forces valuable practice, should they one day be ordered to encircle and attack the island.</p> <p>"Use the momentum to surround," read a slogan used by People's Daily, the Chinese Communist Party's main newspaper, as it announced that the drills had begun. Taiwanese military observers said they did not detect any immediate upsurge in Chinese naval activities.</p> <p>The six zones were chosen for their importance in a potential campaign to seal off Taiwan and thwart foreign intervention, Major General Meng Xiangqing, a professor of strategy at the National Defense University in Beijing, said in an interview on Chinese state television. One zone covers the narrowest part of the Taiwan Strait. Others could be used to block a major port or attack three of Taiwan's main military bases, he said.</p> <p>The zone near Kaohsiung in southern Taiwan, where there are crucial bases, "creates conditions to bolt the door and beat the dog," said General Meng, using a Chinese saying that refers to blocking an enemy's escape route.</p> <p>China's leader, Xi Jinping, has said that he hopes to eventually unify Taiwan and China through peaceful steps. But like his predecessors, he has not ruled out force, and China's military buildup has reached a point where some military commanders and analysts think an invasion is an increasingly plausible, though still highly risky, scenario. The exercises could help Chinese forces test their readiness for that.</p> <p>"They're definitely going to use this as an excuse to do something that helps them prepare for a possible invasion," said Oriana Skylar Mastro, a fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University who studies China's military and its potential to attack Taiwan.</p> <p>"It's not just about the messaging," she said. "Under the guise of signaling, they're trying to basically test their ability to conduct complex maneuvers that are necessary for an amphibious assault on Taiwan."</p> <p>It remains unclear how close Chinese forces will come to Taiwan during the exercises, which are scheduled to end on Sunday. In one possible sign of what to expect, China's Liberation Army Daily said on Thursday that the Eastern Theater Command was holding its own practice operations that included the</p>

navy, air force and rocket force. They were focused on “joint enclosure and control,” assaults on sea and land, and air domination operations, it said.

The Chinese military could also test Taiwan’s responses by firing into the territorial waters directly off its coast. Three of the exercise zones have corners jutting into those waters.

“It signals that, since Taiwan is part of China, it doesn’t get a 12-nautical-mile zone,” said [William Overholt](#), a senior research fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School, referring to the sea perimeter by which Taiwan [defines its territorial waters](#). “Taiwan either has to defend its zone like an independent country or cave.”

Kinmen Island, a Taiwanese-controlled island a little over six miles off China’s coast, [reported that on Wednesday night](#), flying objects of unclear origin — probably drones — flew overhead. Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense said that its website was paralyzed by “denial of service” cyberattacks late on Wednesday night.

“We haven’t seen anything unusual in the Kinmen area, but their movements near Taiwan are more obvious,” Major General Chang Jung-shun of Taiwan’s Kinmen Defense Command said by telephone. “Some of their ships used for exercises have been detected.”

China is trying to reinforce its influence over Taiwan by upgrading deterrence after the visit by Ms. Pelosi, who praised the island’s people for standing strong against Beijing, several Chinese analysts said.

“The tendency of external forces exploiting Taiwan to contain China has become increasingly clear,” [Wu Yongping](#), a professor at Tsinghua University in Beijing who studies Taiwan, said in written answers to questions. “The Chinese government has adopted some unprecedented military operations in response to this.”

One of the People’s Liberation Army’s designated exercise zones lies off the eastern coast of Taiwan, at the farthest point from the Chinese mainland. When China held intimidating military exercises off Taiwan during a crisis 25 years ago, the People’s Liberation Army, or P.L.A., did not go that far.

“It’s an intentional message meant to highlight the P.L.A.’s heightened capacity to project power farther from the Chinese mainland, and it’s a visible signal that China can surround the island,” said [Brian Hart](#), a fellow with the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. “It will also complicate traffic to and around the island from all sides.”

Global Times, a swaggeringly nationalist Chinese newspaper, [raised the possibility](#) of missiles being fired from the mainland into that eastern zone, arcing over Taiwan. “If the Taiwan military responds, the Liberation Army is entirely able to trap the turtle in the jar,” one Chinese commentator, Zhang Xuefeng, told the paper, using a Chinese saying for catching prey with ease.

But Mr. Hart said China was unlikely to fire missiles over Taiwan. “That would be extremely escalatory,” he said. “They will more likely fire ship-based or air-launched missiles into that area without flying missiles over the island.”

After decades of tensions and several military crises with China, many on Taiwan have become inured to threats. But even if China does not take the most potentially incendiary steps this time, experts and officials on the island worry that the operations could spark an incident — a collision at sea or in the air, or a misfired missile — that inflames tensions into a full-fledged crisis.

A monitoring service run by the U.S. Naval Institute [reported on Monday](#) that a strike group led by the U.S.S. Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier was [in the Philippine Sea](#), some distance east of Taiwan, and that the U.S.S. Tripoli, an amphibious assault ship, was also in that area.

“Previously, the Chinese Communists carried out military exercises at a distance, now they’ve become close-up,” Chang Yan-ting, a retired deputy commander of Taiwan’s air force, said in an interview. “The Chinese military exercises around Taiwan will put our national military in a very dangerous position,” he said. “They’re already at our doorstep.”

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HEADLINE	08/03 What if China exercises expand into more?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/03/us/politics/china-exercises-taiwan-fears.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — For years the deliberate “strategic ambiguity” in Washington’s China policy has left unclear how the United States would respond to a full-scale, amphibious invasion of Taiwan.</p> <p>But an equally hard question — maybe harder, in the minds of many senior White House and defense officials — is how to respond to a slow squeeze of the island, in which Chinese forces cut off much of the access to it, physically or digitally.</p> <p>That question may soon be tested for the first time in a quarter of a century. China’s declaration during Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit that it would begin live-fire military exercises in six locations encircling the island could set up the largest crisis in the Taiwan Strait since 1996, when President Bill Clinton ordered American aircraft carriers to the area.</p> <p>But those exercises were significantly farther from Taiwan’s shores than the series the Chinese government has warned mariners and aircraft that it plans. And it took place in a far more benign strategic environment, back when China’s entry into the global economy was supposed to modify its behavior, and when Mr. Clinton would tell Chinese students that the spread of the internet would foster freedom and dissent. It was also when China’s military packed a fraction of the punch it now boasts, including anti-ship missiles developed to deter American warships from getting close.</p> <p>Administration officials say that based on their assessments a full cutoff of access to Taiwan is unlikely — in large part because it would hurt China’s own economy at a time of severe economic slowdown. On Friday, the Group of 7 industrialized nations, the core of the Western alliance, warned China not to retaliate for Ms. Pelosi’s visit, clearly an effort to suggest that China would be widely condemned for overreacting, much as Russia was for its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>But American officials say they worry that the events of the next few days could trigger an unintended confrontation between China’s forces and Taiwan’s, especially if the Chinese military launches a missile over the island, or if an incursion into disputed airspace leads to a midair conflict. Something similar happened 20 years ago, when a Chinese military aircraft collided with an American intelligence-gathering plane.</p> <p>As the military exercises began early Wednesday, White House and Pentagon officials were monitoring the situation closely, trying to figure out if China was sending forces into each of the areas near Taiwan’s coast it has declared closed. But their assessment was that China’s strategy is to intimidate and coerce, without triggering a direct conflict.</p> <p>Outside experts were more concerned that the exercise could escalate.</p> <p>“This is one of the scenarios that is difficult to deal with,” said Bonny Lin, who directed the Taiwan desk at the Pentagon and held other defense positions before moving to the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, where she heads the China Power Project. “If a military exercise transitions to a blockade, when does it become clear that the exercise is now a blockade? Who should be the first to respond? Taiwan’s forces? The United States? It’s not clear.”</p> <p>An exercise-turned-blockade is one of many scenarios that get “war-gamed” in Washington regularly, as American officials try to map out options before a crisis strikes. But nothing really replicates a real-life confrontation.</p>

Mr. Biden, aides say, would have to try to walk the delicate line between avoiding folding to the Chinese and avoiding escalation.

It is even more complicated by the continuing debate over how to help Taiwan become a “porcupine,” or a country too well defended for China to invade. For all the talk of F-16 sales to Taiwan — its fleet is supposed to top 200 of the fighter aircraft by 2026 — there is growing worry that Taiwan is buying the wrong kind of gear to defend itself, and that it needs to learn some lessons from Ukraine.

It is hardly a new debate. Two years ago, a senior defense official, David F. Helvey, warned that as China’s ability to choke off the island rises, Taiwan itself can, “through smart investment, send a clear signal to Beijing that Taiwan’s society and its armed forces are committed to the defense of Taiwan.” But he warned that the sums that Taiwan’s government was committing to acquiring new defensive technology were insufficient for a resilient defense.

The result has been a steady drumbeat from Washington urging Taiwan’s leadership to invest less in expensive F-16 fighters and more on what Mr. Helvey called “large numbers of small things,” the formula that later helped Ukraine resist Russian forces.

That list includes mobile cruise missiles for coastal defense, naval mines, small fast-attack craft and mobile artillery.

President Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan has expressed support for the so-called “asymmetric” strategy and has moved in recent years to increase the defense budget and buy many of the small, mobile weapons that U.S. officials have recommended, like Harpoon missiles. But she has encountered resistance at times from some Taiwanese military officials, who argue that some conventional weapons systems are still necessary to prepare for different scenarios. They have also argued that without an explicit security guarantee from the United States, it would be too risky for Taiwan to give up its lethal weapons.

That view has changed somewhat in recent months as the war in Ukraine has jolted Taiwan’s military and the public, prompting a greater embrace of the “porcupine” strategy. But that war has also depleted stocks and strained production capacity among American and allied defense contractors, meaning Taiwan may need to wait for several years. And that delay gives China an opening.

Moreover, Taiwan’s defense budget hovers at around \$17 billion a year, though it has committed to spend an additional \$8 billion on armaments over the next several years. By comparison, Congress recently apportioned \$52 billion in aid for Ukraine — which doesn’t have Taiwan’s revenue streams to pay for its own defense — and China spends on the order of \$230 billion annually.

Some also say that what Taiwan needs from the United States is not just weapon sales, but other forms of support, ranging from military technology to operational exchanges and training.

While Taiwan’s military is sometimes allowed to participate in defense symposiums, it is rarely invited to join large multinational military exercises because most countries do not officially recognize it as a nation. And while Washington has gradually ramped up training of Taiwanese forces on the island and in the United States in recent years, the island’s mandatory military service and its reservist program are still seen as insufficiently rigorous.

“The U.S. could help us learn how to train more efficiently and mobilize reserve forces more quickly,” said Ou Si-fu, a research fellow at the Institute for National Defense and Security Research, a think tank affiliated with Taiwan’s defense ministry. “They could also help more in terms of technology transfer, to support our indigenous weapons development programs.”

Of course, defending against invasion bears little resemblance to defending against a blockade. Executing a blockade is even harder.

“Threatening a blockade and actually initiating a blockade are two very different things,” said Eric Sayers, a former senior adviser to the U.S. Pacific Command who is a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Mr. Sayers said China has long had the ability to effectively encircle Taiwan if it chose to do so, so the capability itself isn’t a surprise.

“Despite all the threats Beijing has made in recent weeks, it would still be very difficult for the P.L.A. Navy and costly to China’s economy to maintain a blockade for an extended period of time,” Mr. Sayers added, referring to the People’s Liberation Army. “What hurts Taipei’s economy has a similar effect on Beijing.”

Mr. Sayers continued, “What is most significant about China’s response is that it is giving us a preview of how the P.L.A. might deploy an indirect blockade against Taiwan in the future to ratchet up the pressure near an election or other political crisis.”

“Instead of announcing a military blockade they may instead announce an extended military exercise around Taiwan that closes or disrupts shipping routes for 30, 60, 90 days. This makes it less a military operation and more a form of legal warfare to justify an indirect blockade for a duration that Beijing can manipulate.”

Others say the United States could do more to bolster Taiwan’s security by helping it better integrate into the global economic system. Taiwanese officials and analysts argue that strengthening trade links and possibly passing a bilateral trade agreement could help the island reduce its reliance on China, currently its largest trade partner. But China would undoubtedly consider that an aggressive act.

The geopolitical risks of Taiwan’s dependence on the Chinese market were on display this week when just hours after Ms. Pelosi arrived in Taiwan, Beijing moved to suspend exports of natural sand to the island — key for construction — and banned imports from Taiwan of certain types of fruit and fish.

“Economic security is so important to Taiwan’s survival as a democracy,” said Vincent Chao, former political director at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Washington.

Diversifying American support for Taiwan from arms sales is crucial not only to better defend against China, but also to boost morale for a fellow democratic partner, said Mark Stokes, executive director of the Project 2049 Institute, a defense research group in Arlington, Virginia.

“We shouldn’t just be cramming weapons down their throat and robbing them of their agency in terms of determining what their own defense requirements are,” Mr. Stokes said. “What Taiwan needs most from the U.S. is to be treated, as much as possible given the constraints, as a normal partner with respect.”

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HEADLINE	08/03 Sri Lanka protest crackdown
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/03/world/asia/sri-lanka-protest-crackdown.html
GIST	<p>COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — The Sri Lankan government is cracking down on the people who participated in a protest movement that toppled the island nation’s president last month, arresting several demonstration leaders, slapping others with travel bans and ordering the clearing of the last remaining protest tents.</p> <p>The monthslong movement forced out the former president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, whose family had politically dominated the country for the better part of two decades. He fled Sri Lanka last month and resigned.</p> <p>Protesters had blamed Mr. Rajapaksa for the country’s economic collapse after the nation ran out of foreign reserves, leading to shortages of fuel and medicine. As a result, many Sri Lankans are living in dire conditions, with people lining up outside gas stations for days.</p>

Mr. Rajapaksa's successor as president, [Ranil Wickremesinghe](#), immediately declared a state of emergency and made it clear he was going after the protest organizers. He called some protesters a "fascist" threat and said the authorities would take action against those who had occupied government buildings, including the president's residence and office.

"It appears to be a witch hunt," said Ambika Satkunanathan, an activist and a former human rights commissioner in Sri Lanka. "They are hunting people for minor infractions to crush dissent, while people who are responsible for war crimes, for massive corruption, for bringing the country to its knees are able to just continue business as usual."

Among the latest arrests on Wednesday were Joseph Stalin, a leader of a teacher's union, and Mahanama Thero, a Buddhist monk, both of whom were at the forefront of the movement. Jeewantha Peiris, a Catholic priest and another protest fixture, is in hiding after the police raided a church with a warrant for his arrest.

"The right to protest is a democratic right," Mr. Stalin said in a video on social media as he is being taken away by the police. "What crime have I committed? Have I stolen public money or murdered people?"

Those arrested thus far also include a protester accused of stealing the president's official flag, another charged with stealing the president's beer mug, and third said to have sat in the president's chair.

While the movement had remained largely disciplined during months of demonstrations, the climactic day, July 9, turned chaotic in the streets and forced government leaders in hiding.

Protesters [occupied the president's office and his official residence](#), though they quickly tried to restore order there. A mob burned the private residence of Mr. Wickremesinghe, who was prime minister at the time, while other protesters clashed with security forces outside Parliament.

Movement organizers, who had camped along the Galle Face oceanside park in Colombo for months, had distanced themselves from acts of violence and vandalism.

Mr. Wickremesinghe, a veteran politician who had been prime minister half a dozen times, [owes his ascent to the top job](#) to support from Mr. Rajapaksa's party. His actions since taking over as president have essentially made any victory for the protesters partial, with several members of the [Rajapaksa dynasty](#) back in the Parliament and rumors rife about the return of the former president, who remains in Singapore.

Soon after taking office as president, Mr. Wickremesinghe sent the police on [a violent pre-dawn raid](#) of the protest site on July 22, clearing the tents around the president's office and leaving about 50 protesters injured.

Activists said the timing of the raid — just hours ahead of the protesters' publicly declared time for vacating the area — made clear that Mr. Wickremesinghe was flexing his muscles and trying to punish them for their dissent.

The president has acknowledged that it will be months before Sri Lankans see a substantial change in their grim economic reality, as the country continues to plead for help from allies and negotiate with the I.M.F. for a bailout.

On Wednesday, police officers arrived at the protest site and, using megaphones, read out an order to clear the remaining protest tents by Friday.

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HEADLINE	08/03 Switzerland bans Russia gold imports
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/03/world/europe/switzerland-russian-gold-imports.html

GIST	<p>Switzerland on Wednesday banned imports of Russian gold and gold products, on the heels of similar moves by the European Union and the United States.</p> <p>The Federal Council, the Swiss government's seven-member executive board, said in a statement that the gold ban aligned with the European Union's latest sanctions on Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine, and that Switzerland was "implementing the most urgent measures in terms of time and substance."</p> <p>The council added that it had frozen the assets of Russia's state-owned bank Sberbank, after imposing sanctions last month on dozens more individuals and organizations on the European Union's sanctions list.</p> <p>"Switzerland's list of sanctioned persons and entities in connection with the situation in Ukraine is thus fully in line with that of the E.U.," the council said.</p> <p>Agricultural products and oil supplies remain excluded from sanctions, the statement said, attributing this decision to the global food and energy crisis.</p> <p>The country is a leader in the gold refining market, according to a 2018 watch and jewelry sector report by the World Wildlife Fund, with 60 to 70 percent of the world's gold passing through Switzerland to be refined. The precious metal is a common material in Swiss luxury watches.</p> <p>The European Union in July banned imports from Russia of newly minted and refined gold, following similar announcements by the United States, Britain and other Group of 7 countries in June.</p> <p>Officials have described the gold sanctions as another strategy to isolate Russia from the international financial system, with Ukraine's allies already banning most trade with Russia.</p> <p>Russia is one of the world's biggest producers of gold, and has cranked up the mining of new gold to compensate for the frozen reserves held by Russian companies and oligarchs under sanctions, said Christopher Swift, a national security lawyer who formerly worked at the U.S. Treasury Department's office of foreign assets control.</p> <p>Demand for gold has shrunk 8 percent compared with this time last year, according to the World Gold Council.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Pelosi flight to Taiwan took circuitous route
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/03/world/asia/pelosis-widely-watched-flight-to-taipei-took-a-circuitous-route-heres-why.html
GIST	<p>Nancy Pelosi's plane departing Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, for Taipei on Tuesday evening was one of the most closely tracked flights of all time. It was also unusually circuitous, taking a three-hour detour.</p> <p>The reason: to avoid an area heavy with Chinese military presence.</p> <p>The United States Air Force plane carrying Ms. Pelosi flew a roundabout route that experts said was designed to avoid escalating one of the most controversial and high-profile diplomatic visits by a U.S. official to Taiwan in recent history.</p> <p>Data tracking the flight showed Ms. Pelosi's plane departing from Kuala Lumpur and heading southeast toward the Indonesian part of Borneo, then turning north to fly along the eastern part of the Philippines. A more direct — and shorter — route would have been to fly northeast in a direct route over the South China Sea to Taiwan.</p>

The journey took seven hours — the unusual path adding an additional three hours to a journey that would normally take four hours and 15 minutes, said Ian Petchenik, director of communications at FlightRadar24, the website tracking Ms. Pelosi's plane.

The flight path was a clear indication that the possibility of military conflict between the United States and China is all too real in the South China Sea, where China has [built up its military presence](#) with bases in recent years.

“This move of having the plane bypass the South China Sea is one way of showcasing that there is a genuine interest in managing the crisis and de-escalating the situation,” said Collin Koh, a research fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

Flying over Chinese military bases “would have given the Chinese the opportunity to disturb the flight and given them a chance for aircraft interference,” Mr. Koh said. “The risk of such close encounters was too high.”

Officials have described ties between the United States and China as being at their lowest point since 1972, when President Richard Nixon [traveled to Beijing](#) to restart diplomatic relations between the two countries. In June, the American defense secretary, Lloyd J. Austin III, [warned China](#) against “provocative and destabilizing activity” near Taiwan.

The decision by Ms. Pelosi, the speaker of the House, to visit Taiwan — and her reaffirmation of America's “unwavering” support for Taiwan's democracy — has inflamed Beijing, which claims the island for its own. For weeks it was unclear whether she would even go through with the stop in Taiwan during her planned trip to Asia. Then, while her flight was in the air on Tuesday, more than 2.9 million people logged on to watch the flight path on FlightRadar 24, a popular flight tracking site. The heavy traffic load caused the site to falter at one point.

It was the most tracked flight of all time, FlightRadar24 said in a blog post, surpassing even the [return flight to Russia](#) of Aleksei Navalny, the Russian opposition leader, after a near-fatal nerve agent attack.

When Ms. Pelosi departed Taiwan on Tuesday evening, interest in her travels was somewhat more muted. Just 92,000 people were watching.

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HEADLINE	08/04 SKorea president avoiding Pelosi?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/04/south-korean-leader-accused-of-avoiding-nancy-pelosi-in-bid-to-placate-china
GIST	<p>South Korea's president, Yoon Suk-yeol, has been accused of trying to placate China by avoiding Nancy Pelosi, a day after she became the most senior US official to visit Taiwan for a quarter of a century and sparked a furious response from Beijing.</p> <p>Yoon, a conservative who took office in May, will reportedly speak to Pelosi on the phone but will not meet her in person during her visit to Seoul on Thursday, South Korean media said.</p> <p>Yoon had reportedly planned a summer holiday well in advance of the US House speaker's decision to visit the region, which included a controversial stop in Taiwan on Wednesday that drew threats of retaliation from China. The South Korean leader is reportedly in Seoul.</p> <p>Beijing, which considers Taiwan part of Chinese territory, on Thursday began four days of “unprecedented” live-fire drills in six locations encircling the island, in a show of force designed to communicate its anger with Washington and Taipei.</p> <p>It also summoned the US ambassador in Beijing and banned thousands of food imports from Taiwan.</p>

Critics have accused Yoon of avoiding Pelosi to avoid antagonising [China](#), South Korea's biggest trading partner. The South Korean broadcaster TBS quoted an official at the presidential Blue House as denying that China had been a factor in Yoon's decision not to meet Pelosi, as his itinerary had been finalised before her visit was announced.

When Pelosi last visited [South Korea](#), in 2015, she met the then president, Park Geun-hye, and the then foreign minister, Yun Byung-se.

Kim Heung-kyu, director of the US-China Policy Institute at Ajou University, told the Korea Times. "Pelosi is the number three politician in the US, and if this were in the past, the president or the foreign minister would have tried to hold talks with her, but I think that this time the government seems to have decided not to excessively politicise the issue and unnecessarily antagonise China."

Pelosi met the Taiwanese president, Tsai Ing-wen, and is expected to hold talks with the Japanese prime minister, Fumio Kishida in Tokyo on Friday. Pelosi said on Wednesday that her visit to Taiwan made it "unequivocally clear" that the US would "not abandon" its democratic ally.

In Seoul, she was due to meet her South Korean counterpart, national assembly speaker Kim Jin-pyo and members of the ruling and main opposition parties.

Reports said Pelosi and Kim would issue a joint statement and summarise their discussions on North Korea and regional security, but would not take questions from journalists.

Pelosi is also planning to visit the truce village of Panmunjom, located along the heavily armed border between South and North Korea.

A possible meeting with the South Korean foreign minister, Park Jin, was ruled out after he left for Cambodia early on Wednesday to attend an Asean meeting.

In Tokyo, Pelosi and Kishida are expected to repeat their commitment to US-[Japan](#) cooperation in ensuring a "free and open Indo-Pacific" region amid increasing Chinese military activity in the South and [East China seas](#).

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HEADLINE	08/03 Men sue Alaska Air: racial discrimination
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/black-muslim-men-sue-alaska-airlines-after-getting-kicked-off-flight/
GIST	<p>Two men, both of whom are Black and Muslim, are suing Alaska Airlines for alleged racial discrimination and violations of their civil rights, saying they were kicked off a flight in February 2020 over text messages in Arabic.</p> <p>Abobakkr Dirar and Mohamed Elamin, both American citizens, were heading out on a business trip together from Seattle to San Francisco when they were unjustly removed from their flight, according to their complaint filed against the airline in federal court Tuesday.</p> <p>A passenger sitting next to Dirar in first class saw him texting in Arabic. The passenger, who didn't speak or read Arabic, was alarmed by the messages and complained to a flight attendant before exiting the plane, according to the lawsuit.</p> <p>That passenger's concerns led to a chain reaction of "unjustified, unnecessary, and self-serving display of discriminatory security theater," the lawsuit alleged, even after it was clear the text messages were innocuous and neither man posed a threat.</p>

“Alaska Airlines could have in that moment chosen to not listen to a passenger’s complaint, but they did,” said Katie Walker, a spokesperson for the Washington state chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, which is [representing Dirar and Elamin](#).

In a statement, Alaska Airlines said it could not share details on the incident because the case is pending litigation.

“Alaska Airlines strictly prohibits unlawful discrimination. We take such complaints very seriously,” the company said in a statement Tuesday. “Our greatest responsibility is to ensure that our flight operations are safe — every day.”

Advocates said the incident reflects a pattern of xenophobia and Islamophobia that Muslim and Middle Eastern passengers experience while flying. In the years since 9/11, some Muslim travelers have reported [additional security screenings](#), [racial profiling](#) and [invasive religious questioning](#) at airports and on flights.

“Flying While Muslim has been for far-too-long a very real phenomenon,” CAIR-WA Executive Director Imraan Siddiqi said in a statement. “This incident with Alaska Airlines is one of the most egregious examples of this happening in recent years.”

After receiving the complaint about Dirar’s text messages from the passenger, an airline manager pulled both Dirar and Elamin off the plane, according to the lawsuit. No passenger complaint was raised against Elamin, but “he was also racially discriminated against through wrongful removal and exclusion from Flight 304” because he looked and sounded like Dirar, the lawsuit alleged.

The Alaska Airlines manager, who spoke and read Arabic, then reviewed Dirar’s phone, finding nothing threatening in his text messaging history.

Despite that confirmation, airline personnel still deplaned everyone else on board for additional security screening, “humiliating them before their fellow Flight 304 passengers,” according to the complaint.

The captain of the flight also ordered the first-class lavatory tanks used by Elamin before takeoff to be emptied, and a manager asked a Port of Seattle police officer whether a K-9 unit could sweep the plane, the complaint stated.

Alaska Airlines ultimately didn’t allow Dirar and Elamin back on the flight, and booked them on later flights, prohibiting them from flying together, according to the lawsuit.

Dirar and Elamin arrived hours later than their original flight to San Francisco, according to the complaint, and “were too humiliated and traumatized by Defendant’s actions to enjoy their trip.”

“When we traveled that day, we were not treated the same as other people, and it made me feel like I was not equal to other people,” Dirar said in a statement. “I don’t want this to happen again, to anyone, Muslim or not Muslim.”

The lawsuit seeks an injunction to order Alaska Airlines to provide racial and religious sensitivity training to all employees, as well as punitive damages and compensation for economic damages and emotional distress.

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HEADLINE	08/03 Fire crews continue battling Vantage blaze
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/wildfire/vantage-highway-fire-danger-continues/281-367962c6-e8e8-4f46-a17b-a545d556fee5
GIST	VANTAGE, Wash. — Fire crews continued battling the Vantage Highway Fire Wednesday amid Red Flag Warning-conditions.

A [Red Flag Warning](#) means high temperatures are combined with low humidity and stronger winds, meaning there's an increased risk of fire danger.

Hot, dry and windy weather combined with the need to traverse off-road areas meant a heavy workload for firefighters who have been working the scene since Aug. 1.

"Now we're getting into areas of the fire that are difficult to access, we don't have road access (to) all of the sections of the fire we need to reach to stop its path," said [Southeast Washington Interagency Incident Management Team](#) (SE WA IMT) Public Information Officer Grace DeBusschere. "So firefighters are hiking in, boating on the Columbia and using aircraft to fight the fire."

SE WA IMT says evacuation orders for the nearby town of Vantage have been lifted. One cabin and three other structures were burned, but no residential buildings are currently thought to be threatened.

Wednesday, authorities said the fire had burned down into the Columbia River gorge on the Kittitas County side with winds carrying smoke across the river and up into Grant County.

Wednesday, Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) said it had recorded 45 fire starts since July 27, as high temperatures- in some areas, into the hundreds- converged with a high amount of fuel that grew over the wet spring and dried out this summer.

The DNR says most fires are human-caused -- though that includes accidents and incidents such as traffic crashes or chains dragging on a road.

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HEADLINE	08/03 Monkeypox spreading, shortage of vaccine
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattle-residents-driving-canada-vaccine-local-monkeypox-cases-are-doubling-weekly/UPDJSCRF7RGQPP75RTDWBV3RCI/
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — Monkeypox cases in King County are roughly doubling every week, according to Public Health — Seattle & King County. There are currently 139 cases, compared to 83 cases on Wednesday of last week.</p> <p>There is a major demand for the vaccine but, so far, not nearly enough to go around. The shortage is pushing some people to drive to Canada to get the monkeypox vaccine rather than wait.</p> <p>"It just brought me a lot of fear and anxiety, honestly," said Justin Moore, a Seattle resident. He said as the virus started to take off, it was difficult to sort through misinformation. "Watching friends across the country get it definitely amplified my fear," he said.</p> <p>King County expects it will "likely need vaccines for closer to 40,000 people in the near term," or 80,000 doses of the two-shot vaccine. As of July 27, the date of the last received shipment, Public Health has received a total of 4,720 doses.</p> <p>Moore said he heard about others in the LGBTQ community getting access to the vaccine in Vancouver, British Columbia, and decided that was the next necessary step for him.</p> <p>"I went with my partner and three friends, and it was such an easy process," Moore said. "They were very willing to accommodate anybody regardless of citizenship," he said.</p> <p>Jackson Hern, another Seattle resident, took a similar path when talking about it with friends at a trivia night.</p>

“We all scheduled a clinic for appointments right then and there. We all went to Vancouver and back — day trip,” Hern said. “It’s huge. Having the vaccine and that protection gives me confidence in the activities that I do, knowing I’m protecting myself and stopping the spread with me,” he said.

The ongoing spread plus vaccine shortage has local doctors renewing warnings on how to keep yourself safe.

Dr. Stephaun Wallace is with Fred Hutch. Some of his work involves LGBTQ health, HIV vaccine trials, and COVID-19 vaccine trials.

“If I could have a word with folks, I’d simply say to not assume because you’re not a gay person or MSM (men having sex with men) or part of the LGBTQ community, that this can’t impact you,” Wallace said.

Monkeypox is spread primarily through skin-to-skin contact and can be sexually transmitted. [Symptoms](#) often include a rash that develops into painful sores.

But it can also be spread through contact with objects, fabrics, and surfaces that have been used by someone with monkeypox.

Dr. Wallace recommends to consider avoiding large gatherings, “particularly in spaces where people are not wearing many clothes.”

“If you do decide to go, just be mindful ... this is happening. Also, know that you may want to wear long clothing; you may want to ensure your skin is covered,” Wallace said. “There is a concern because as the pustules are developing, they might rupture onto clothing or get onto other things that are high touch points in communities or social spaces.”

How long can monkeypox survive on surfaces? Experts don’t know for sure, but [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cites a study](#) where investigators found live virus 15 days after a patient’s home was left unoccupied. The website also notes the virus likely survives longer on porous surfaces like clothing compared to hard surfaces like glass. The CDC notes disinfectants do kill the virus — just make sure to follow the manufacturer’s instructions on how long the liquid needs to sit to kill viruses before wiping it away.

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HEADLINE	08/03 Level 3 evacuations for wildfire near Selah
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/level-3-evacuations-issued-parts-selah/EWERF6YGLBHUNIT7FFVSBJU46/
GIST	<p>YAKIMA COUNTY, Wash. — Level 3 evacuations — meaning leave now — have been issued for parts of the town of Selah in Yakima County on Wednesday.</p> <p>Anyone within a mile and a half from Malloy Road and North Wenas Road are advised to leave.</p> <p>The fire is being called the Cow Canyon fire and has burned 1,000 acres with 0% containment.</p> <p>A Level 1 evacuation notice — be on alert — was issued for some living in Kittitas County, as the fire is nearby.</p> <p>The notice applies to the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manastash Road – all residences and roads south of Manastash Road.• Manastash Canyon.• Durr Road. <p>A Level 2 evacuation notice — be ready to leave — was also issued for the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Umptanum Road (South of Manastash Road).• Overlook Road.• Coyote Run.

	Air and ground resources were ordered by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources to help fight the fire.
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HEADLINE	08/03 Wildfire south Cheney prompts evacuations
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/wildfire-near-williams-lake-prompts-evacuations/NAAST5QOHRBPXJ7W6ULO7RADYM/
GIST	<p>SPOKANE COUNTY, Wash. — A wildfire near Williams Lake, 15 miles south of Cheney, prompted Level 3 evacuations for parts of the area on Wednesday.</p> <p>The evacuations are for Martin Road to Long Road, Cheney Plaza to Williams Lake Road and east of Rock Lake Road.</p> <p>The fire, which started at 2:30 p.m., has burned at least 100 acres and is threatening approximately 400 structures, according to the State Fire Marshal's Office.</p> <p>State resources have been ordered to help fight the fire.</p> <p>The cause of the fire is under investigation.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Whatcom Co. confirms 1st monkeypox case
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/first-case-monkeypox-confirmed-whatcom-county/MR4GLGWSHVDWNJSD6653SC3Y4Q/
GIST	<p>The Whatcom County Health Department is investigating a confirmed case of monkeypox in the area, the department announced Wednesday.</p> <p>According to the health department, a local person in their 50s tested positive for the virus on Tuesday. The person was not hospitalized and is isolating at home.</p> <p>The health department said that while the first cases in Washington were linked to international travel, the Whatcom County case appears to be linked to exposure in King County. The health department is working to identify anyone who may have been in close contact with the person who tested positive.</p> <p>“It is important for people to know that risk to the general public remains low,” said Amy Harley, co-health officer for the Whatcom County Health Department. “We have been preparing for the possibility of MPV in Whatcom County for the last few months. The U.S. has successfully controlled outbreaks of MPV in the past. This virus is not spread as easily as COVID-19, and we already have vaccines and treatments available.”</p> <p>The monkeypox virus causes a rash that can look like bumps, sores, blisters or ulcers, the health department said. Some people also develop flu-like symptoms.</p> <p>According to the health department, anyone can get MPV. The virus spreads during close, physical contact with the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An MPV rash, sores or scabs. • Objects or surfaces used by a person with MPV. • Respiratory droplets or oral fluids from someone with MPV. <p>The health department said the virus can spread as soon as symptoms start and until all sores heal and a fresh layer of skin forms, which can take several weeks.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Seattle mayor decries use of eco blocks
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SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/project-seattle/mayor-harrell-speaks-out-about-eco-blocks-that-aim-to-deter-long-term-rv-parking
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The massive concrete blocks -- some that weigh nearly 2,000 pounds -- are being placed on public streets and sidewalks in Seattle, prompting concern from housing advocates who say the city isn't doing enough to crack down on those who place them. 21</p> <p>The eco blocks, which are used to deter long-term parking by owners of RVs and other vehicles, have appeared in several neighborhoods with dozens lined up in a row in a West Seattle neighborhood with others scattered along public streets in Ballard, SODO and Georgetown.</p> <p>In many areas, the blocks are popular although officials with the Seattle Department of Transportation say it's illegal to leave them on a public street or space.</p> <p>The city also does not issue permits for eco-blocks.</p> <p>KOMO News recently reported on several of the blocks being placed in West Seattle around some businesses and a residential area shortly after an RV encampment was removed.</p> <p>Several of them were observed on various streets in the Ballard area.</p> <p>On 45th Street near 8th Avenue, there were 10 and some looked as if they had been dropped off with a crane. Some were parallel to the curb while others were left on an angle.</p> <p>It's not clear who placed the blocks in Ballard or West Seattle, which can be part of the city's challenge in stopping their placement.</p> <p>The mayor addressed the issue of eco blocks that are being left in several Seattle neighborhoods.</p> <p>The eco blocks have become a deterrent, or as one resident said "an act of desperation" because they make it practically impossible for anyone to park -including RV's.</p> <p>We've heard from various residents that the concrete blocks are one way to take back their neighborhood or their street.</p> <p>But homeless advocates have complained to the city that if encampments, with their RVs and vehicles have to move -- then so should the eco-blocks.</p> <p>On Monday city officials told KOMO NEWS it had issued 25 warnings regarding illegally placed eco-blocks but no citations and no fines.</p> <p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell weighed in on the blocks Wednesday.</p> <p>"I'm out there talking to small business and talking to homeless advocates about that issue (and) we do want them removed," he said. "We will monitor and regulate and again we have SDOT working feverishly on this issue."</p> <p>There is one big hurdle, however. Who are leaving the blocks?</p> <p>The mayor told said it's a real issue.</p> <p>SDOT sends out notices to all the adjacent property owners, warning them if they left the blocks they have to remove them, but in some cases no one is admitting to doing it.</p> <p>"It's a little harder to enforce, but certainly looking at a very smart and fair enforcement strategy," Harrell said, insisting it's an issue the city is working on but the eco-blocks is just one small piece and it's about dealing with the entire issue of encampments.</p>

	"What we will say under our administration they see we are trying to make areas safe, healthy and clean (and) we are trying to house people," Harrell said. "So our strategy just can't be focused on one issue, it's a whole ecosystem around there and we are on our job so we understand it, but eco blocks are just not the way either. We are looking for a fair, constitutional approach to our public's safety and health and that's what we are going to do. But eco-blocks are just not the way either."
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HEADLINE	08/03 Seattle schools: math can be 'oppressive'
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/school-district-teaches-math-is-oppressive-insists-kids-recognize-inequality-of-testing
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (TND) — The Seattle Public Schools (SPS) system has been using a “Math Ethnic Studies Framework” since 2019 that seeks to end “oppressive mathematical practices” and advance the subject toward a more “collectivist” vision.</p> <p>The framework encompasses instruction to students in kindergarten through 12th grade and is made up of four primary themes: Origins, Identity, and Agency; Power and Oppression; History of Resistance and Liberation; and Reflection and Action.</p> <p>A “learning target” underneath the “Power and Oppression” theme wants students to be able to identify and explain how math, science and technology oppress and marginalize people of color. Another “learning target” insists students should be able to “identify the inherent inequities of the standardized testing system used to oppress and marginalize” communities of color.</p> <p>“Nothing to see here. Just a Seattle public school curriculum suggesting that mathematics is ‘oppressive’ and that we advance a collectivist vision,” tweeted Chalkboard Review Editor-In-Chief Daniel Buck.</p> <p>Included in Buck’s tweet was a screenshot of one of the “Essential Questions” students should be able to answer and discuss, according to SPS’s framework.</p> <p>“Can you suggest resolutions to oppressive mathematical practices?” the curriculum’s “essential question” asks.</p> <p>Underneath that question, the framework suggests asking students how they “can change mathematics from individualistic to collectivist thinking.”</p> <p>The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) published a book in 2012 pushing the idea of “Teaching Mathematics for Social Justice (TMSJ).” An excerpt from the book asserted that TMSJ “helps students learn to use mathematics as a tool for social change,” according to Buck.</p> <p>“It’s all part of the broader ‘critical pedagogy.’ Education is no longer about academic training but social change,” Buck said in another tweet. “Everything — from math classes to SEL — becomes a part of the larger progressive project,” he concluded.</p> <p>A California-based advocacy group, under its “Dismantling Racism in Mathematics Instruction” initiative reportedly funded by a \$1 million grant from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, created a workbook last year to give teachers steps for “dismantling racism” in math instruction.</p> <p>Even leaders from NCTM spoke out about the workbook after it was released, according to The 74.</p> <p>“Are we building bridges or throwing grenades?” David Barnes, NCTM’s associate executive director, asked. “When you get to page two and what’s bolded is ‘dismantling white supremacy,’ there are some people that cannot read past that.”</p> <p>The National Desk reached out the SPS for comment, but did not hear back. If a response is received, this story will be updated.</p>

HEADLINE	08/03 Mobile home rent skyrocketing
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/mobile-home-rent-on-the-rise-as-more-investment-firms-buy-communities-recession-housing-market
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (TND) — One of the most affordable housing options is now becoming more expensive.</p> <p>Nearly 20 million Americans live in manufactured homes but their rent is going up dramatically. Many residents are low-income, disabled or seniors and now, their cost of living is skyrocketing amid a rise in corporate ownership.</p> <p>After a lifetime together, Candi Evans and her husband started downsizing, moving into a manufactured home community in North Liberty, Iowa — something they could afford. Evans owns her home and pays to rent land.</p> <p>“It was normal to live in a manufactured home park for years and maybe see a \$5 or \$10 or \$15 increase,” Evans said.</p> <p>Evans says that changed in 2019 after an investment firm bought her mobile home community. Soon after, a letter came.</p> <p>“There was a note taped on my front door, and it said that my rent would increase by 63% within two months,” Evans said.</p> <p>After she contacted the media and made noise, that increase got spread out over two years but it wasn't the last.</p> <p>“As of right now, today, my rent has increased by 74%,” Evans said.</p> <p>Investment firms are snapping up manufactured home communities at a rapid rate.</p> <p>Real Capital Analytics, a market research firm, said in a June 2021 report that institutional investors accounted for 23% of manufactured housing park purchases over the previous two years. That’s up from 13% in the two years before that.</p> <p>New owners may come with even higher rent and now Evans is fearful of losing her home, a favorite gathering place after her husband passed away.</p> <p>“We're not asking for anything that we haven't worked for. We're not asking for a handout. We're asking to be part of the American dream in a fair way,” she said.</p> <p>The rising cost of rent is just one obstacle. The Washington Post reports that nationally, the average sales price of manufactured homes has risen nearly 50% during the pandemic.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Lab techs pushback monkeypox patients
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/03/health/monkeypox-blood-phlebotomists/index.html
GIST	<p>Many technicians at Labcorp and Quest Diagnostics, two of the largest commercial labs in the US, have been refusing to draw blood from patients who might have monkeypox, CNN has learned.</p> <p>Labcorp and Quest don’t dispute that in many cases, their phlebotomists are not taking blood from possible monkeypox patients. What remains unclear, after company statements and follow-ups from CNN, is whether the phlebotomists are refusing on their own to take blood or if it is the company policy that</p>

prevents them. The two testing giants say they're reviewing their safety policies and procedures for their employees.

Infectious disease experts who treat monkeypox patients say that the refusals are based on stigma and slow efforts to identify and isolate patients with monkeypox at a time when the nation's health officials are coming under [criticism](#) for struggling to get the outbreak under control. As of Tuesday, there were 6,326 reported cases of monkeypox, an 81% increase from a week before, according to [data](#) from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"This is absolutely inexcusable. It's a grave dereliction of duty," said David Harvey, executive director of the National Coalition of STD Directors, which represents 1,600 sexual health clinics in the US, some of which have phlebotomists from commercial labs including Labcorp and Quest in their offices. The commercial labs employ tens of thousands of phlebotomists – health care professionals who draw blood – in various types of clinics and doctors' offices across the country, as well as in their own patient service centers.

Although monkeypox is diagnosed by swabbing lesions, blood tests are necessary to differentiate the virus from other types of infections, infectious disease experts say. Harvey said doctors at sexual health clinics have had to find workarounds when phlebotomists have refused to take blood from suspected monkeypox patients.

"We can't afford a delay in diagnostic testing because commercial labs aren't doing the right thing," he said.

Harvey added that it feels like the refusals are "a modern-day example of discrimination" – a viewpoint shared by others.

"This reminds me of the olden days when people didn't want to care for HIV patients," said Arthur Caplan, a bioethicist at New York University.

Monkeypox cases in the US have been mainly among men who have sex with men, and when a technician does not draw blood, it "perpetuates more stigma and fear and anxiety" for a virus that's already stigmatized, added Dr. Peter Chin-Hong, a member of the California Department of Public Health's Monkeypox Virus Scientific Advisory Committee who is caring for monkeypox patients.

Chin-Hong, an infectious disease specialist at UCSF Health, said men are avoiding getting tested for the virus for fear of being stigmatized.

"The fact that phlebotomists are afraid of taking specimens makes it even more unappealing for someone to ask for a monkeypox test," he said. "So this is going to make it even worse."

Phlebotomists take blood from people with many kinds of infections on a regular basis, and [monkeypox](#) is not new: The US has seen cases before, including two last year and dozens in 2003. The amount of pox virus in blood is "low," according to the [CDC](#), which instructs health care workers to use [standard precautions](#) to prevent transmission when handling specimens from suspected or confirmed monkeypox patients.

'Some of our phlebotomists have been scared'

Blood tests are necessary not only to differentiate between monkeypox and other infections but to test for other sexually transmitted infections, such as syphilis, since people with monkeypox sometimes have STIs.

If suspected monkeypox patients don't have their blood drawn, "the standard of care is not being followed," said Harvey, the director of the sexual health clinics association.

In an email to CNN on Monday morning, a Quest spokeswoman wrote that “we follow CDC guidelines that state that patients with confirmed or suspected monkeypox infection should be isolated. Once an individual is out of isolation, we will provide service for them.”

The spokeswoman, Kim Gorode, sent a link to [these CDC guidelines](#) to back up Quest’s policy. However, those guidelines don’t say that health care services should be delayed until after an isolation period. In fact, the CDC says its isolation recommendations “do not apply in healthcare settings.”

CDC spokeswoman Kristen Nordlund said that “CDC’s [monkeypox isolation guidance](#) specifically states that people should remain isolated, except to get medical care. Obtaining a sample for testing is medical care that could lead to diagnosis or treatment if warranted.”

Since the first US case was identified in May, the [CDC](#) has given monkeypox infection control guidelines to health-care providers. That page offers detailed instructions on how to treat these patients safely and notes that transmission in health-care settings has been “rarely” reported.

Later Monday, Gorode wrote in an email to CNN that “we are now evaluating our guidance in light of updates posted on the CDC site today.” She did not specify what those updates were. CDC spokesman Jason McDonald said the only update Monday was that the sentence about the isolation guidelines not applying to health-care settings was moved higher on the page.

Gorode added that “we want to ensure every patient has access to the testing they need while also fostering a safe environment for our employees and all of our patients.”

Labcorp executive Dr. Brian Caveney told CNN last week that “up until now, we have typically not been doing” blood draws from suspected monkeypox patients but that the company was reviewing its policies, and this was “likely to change.”

Caveney, the company’s president of diagnostics, said Labcorp was “trying to make sure that our work force is safe but also to ensure that we take care of our customers while we were figuring out the appropriate occupational safety regulations and policies.”

“(Monkeypox) is new – nobody knew what it was – some nurses and doctors are scared of it. Some of our phlebotomists have been scared – appropriately – of it,” he said.

But the head of a phlebotomists’ group said they shouldn’t be scared, as long as they take standard precautions.

Diane Crawford, CEO of the National Phlebotomy Association, said she is “disappointed” that labs are allowing phlebotomists to refuse to draw blood from suspected or confirmed monkeypox patients. “It is a problem. It’s just like a doctor refusing to take care of a patient,” she said.

Calls for CDC to do more education

Caplan, the bioethicist, questioned why Quest and Labcorp are working on guidelines now for their phlebotomists when the first monkeypox case appeared in the US more than two months ago. “This should have been done already,” he said.

Caplan said the CDC needed to do more to educate phlebotomists beyond the pages on its website. “They need an educational rollout (for phlebotomists) and not just issue guidance. That’s very, very important,” he said.

He said education about standard safety precautions should help phlebotomists feel comfortable taking specimens from these patients.

	<p>“I don’t want you sickening out or leaving or taking a new job, which would harm the availability of these services,” he said. “And we have the obligation to make their work as safe and risk-free as we can, and that goes beyond just information on websites.”</p> <p>But Caplan added that at the end of the day, phlebotomists do need to take blood from people who have, or might have, monkeypox.</p> <p>“We want you to do it, it’s important to help control the outbreaks, and this is the kind of risk factor you signed up for,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Gas prices keep sinking
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/03/energy/gas-price-decline/index.html
GIST	<p>New YorkCNN Business — Prices at the pump continue to sink, providing relief to inflation-weary consumers and an economy mired in a slowdown.</p> <p>The national average for regular gasoline dropped three cents to \$4.16 a gallon on Wednesday, according to AAA. That marks the 50th consecutive day of falling prices.</p> <p>Gas prices have tumbled by 86 cents since hitting a record average high of \$5.02 on June 14. Over the past month alone the national average is down by 65 cents.</p> <p>Nineteen states have average gas prices below \$4, including Ohio, Iowa and Wisconsin, according to AAA.</p> <p>The steady decline in gas prices has been driven by multiple factors, including recession fears that have knocked down oil prices and the fact that some Americans cut back on driving when gas prices spiked above \$5 a gallon.</p> <p>“When people pay and they see \$100 for the bill, they panic and become apoplectic,” said Tom Kloza, global head of energy analysis at the Oil Price Information Service.</p> <p>Kloza also credited the unprecedented release of emergency oil by the Biden administration from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, though he conceded it’s difficult to quantify the impact.</p> <p>No matter the cause, falling prices at the pump give a boost to consumers grappling with high prices on food, rent and everyday items.</p> <p>Although the average price nationally is \$4.16 a gallon, Kloza noted figure is lifted by high prices in places like California. The median price, on the other hand, is \$3.99, according to OPIS.</p> <p>Some analysts argue prices will continue to dip, especially as the summer driving season winds down.</p> <p>“This streak has more room to run,” said Kloza.</p> <p>Andy Lipow, president of consulting firm Lipow Oil Associates, expects the national average will drop to \$4.10 a gallon in the next seven to 10 days and \$4 by Labor Day.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Russia aims at Zelenskiy’s hometown
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/ukraine-says-russia-creating-strike-144148613.html
GIST	<p>KYIV (Reuters) - Ukraine said on Wednesday that Russia had started creating a military strike force aimed at President Volodymyr Zelenskiy's hometown of Kryvyi Rih and warned that Moscow could be preparing new offensive operations in southern Ukraine.</p>

Russia holds swathes of Ukraine's south that it captured in the early phases of its Feb. 24 invasion, but Kyiv has said it will mount a counter-offensive. It said on Tuesday it had already recaptured 53 villages in occupied Kherson region.

In its regular update on the war in the south, Ukraine's southern military command described the situation as tense and said Russia attacked along the frontline on Aug. 2.

The steel-producing city of Kryvyi Rih where Zelenskiy grew up lies around 50 km (30 miles) from the southern frontline.

"(Russia) has begun creating a strike group in the Kryvyi Rih direction. It's also quite likely that the enemy is preparing a hostile counter-offensive with the subsequent plan of getting to the administrative boundary of Kherson region," the southern military command said.

Ukraine has been trying to ratchet up pressure on Russia's positions in the strategically important Black Sea region of Kherson and has used Western-supplied long-range weapons to conduct strikes on Russian supply lines and ammunition dumps.

Ukraine's military said in a statement that Russian forces were scoping out basements in the region to turn them into bomb shelters to store military hardware.

Late on Tuesday, Zelensky described the fighting on parts of the eastern frontline in the heavily industrialised Donbas as "just hell" in his nightly address to the nation.

Russia has not claimed any major territorial gains in its invasion since it claimed to have captured Ukraine's eastern Luhansk region around a month ago.

But on Tuesday Ukraine's military command acknowledged that Russia had had "partial success" in the "Donetsk-Pisky direction" around the city of Donetsk that is held by Russia and Russian-backed separatists.

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HEADLINE	08/03 Ukraine dismisses 'negotiated solution'
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-accuses-us-direct-ukraine-war-role-missile-attacks-2022-08-03/
GIST	<p>KYIV/ISTANBUL, Aug 3 (Reuters) - Ukraine on Wednesday dismissed comments by ex-German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder that Russia wanted a "negotiated solution" to the war and said any dialogue would be contingent on a Russian ceasefire and the withdrawal of Russian troops.</p> <p>Schroeder, a friend of Russian President Vladimir Putin and increasingly derided in Germany for his pro-Russia stance, said last month's agreement on grain shipments from Ukraine, aimed at easing a global food crisis, might offer a way forward.</p> <p>The first grain ship since the war started passed through the Bosphorus Strait on Wednesday en route to Lebanon. read more</p> <p>"The good news is that the Kremlin wants a negotiated solution," Schroeder told Stern weekly and broadcasters RTL/ntv, adding he had met Putin in Moscow last week. "A first success is the grain deal, perhaps that can be slowly expanded to a ceasefire."</p> <p>In response, Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak described Schroeder as a "voice of the Russian royal court" and made clear that the grain agreement would not lead to negotiations.</p> <p>"If Moscow wants dialogue, the ball is in its court. First — a cease-fire and withdrawal of troops, then — constructive (dialogue)," Podolyak wrote on Twitter.</p>

The grain agreement, brokered by the United Nations and Turkey, has been hailed as a rare diplomatic success in the more than five months of war since Putin sent his troops over the border on what he calls a "special military operation". Tentative efforts at peace talks in the early stages of the conflict went nowhere.

But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy played down its importance on Wednesday, saying the shipment was a fraction of the crop Kyiv must sell to help salvage its shattered economy.

The ship, Razoni, left Odesa on the Black Sea early on Monday carrying 26,527 tonnes of corn to the Lebanese port of Tripoli.

Zelenskiy, speaking via video to students in Australia, interpreter, said more time was needed to see whether other grain shipments would follow.

"Just recently, thanks to the U.N. in partnership with Turkey, we had a first ship with the delivery of grain, but it's still nothing. But we hope it's a tendency that will continue," he told the students.

He said Ukraine, one of the world's top grain producers before the war, had to export a minimum 10 million tonnes of grain to urgently help bring down its budget deficit which was running at \$5 billion a month.

HARVEST FOR THE WORLD

A senior Turkish official said three ships could leave Ukrainian ports daily following the Razoni's departure, while Ukraine's infrastructure minister said 17 more ships had been loaded with agricultural produce and were waiting to set sail.

Ukraine's forecast for its wartime 2022 harvest has increased to 65 million-67 million tonnes of grain from 60 million tonnes, Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said on Wednesday.

In a Telegram message, he praised farmers for pressing ahead with the harvest, even in areas where shelling continues.

Ukraine, known as Europe's bread basket, hopes to export 20 million tonnes of grain held in silos and 40 million tonnes from the current harvest, initially from Odesa and nearby Pivdennyi and Chornomorsk.

"The war...is almost killing the economy. It's in a coma," Zelenskiy said. "Russia's blocking of the ports is a great loss for the economy."

Zelenskiy has repeatedly warned that Moscow may try to obstruct exports despite signing up to the deal.

Russia, which blockaded the ports after the Feb. 24 invasion, has said it wants to see more done to facilitate the exports of its own grain and fertilisers.

It has denied responsibility for the food crisis, saying sanctions by the West, which regards the war as an unprovoked imperial-style Russian land grab, have slowed its exports.

Russia also said that the United States was directly involved in the conflict in Ukraine because U.S. spies were approving and coordinating Ukrainian missile strikes on Russian forces. [read more](#)

U.S. President Joe Biden has said he wants Ukraine to defeat Russia and has supplied billions of dollars of arms to Kyiv. But the United States does not want a direct confrontation between U.S. and Russian soldiers.

Ukraine and Russia have traded accusations over a missile strike or explosion on Friday that appeared to have killed dozens of Ukrainian prisoners of war in the frontline town of Olenivka, held by Moscow-backed separatists in eastern Donetsk.

	<p>U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday he would launch a fact-finding mission into the deaths, which he said had been requested by both sides. read more</p> <p>Ukraine said on Wednesday that Russia had started creating a military strike force aimed at Zelenskiy's hometown of Kryvyi Rih and warned that Moscow could be preparing new offensive operations in southern Ukraine.</p> <p>Russia holds swathes of Ukraine's south that it captured in the early phases of its invasion, but Kyiv has said it will mount a counter-offensive. It said on Tuesday it had already recaptured 53 villages in occupied Kherson region.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Taiwan expects 'psychological warfare' rise
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-expects-increased-psychological-warfare-attacks-after-pelosi-visit-2022-08-03/
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Aug 3 (Reuters) - Taiwan pledged on Wednesday to step up security against possible disruptions by "overseas forces" including cyber attacks as tensions with China rise following the visit to the self-ruled island by U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi.</p> <p>China demonstrated its outrage over the highest-level U.S. visit in 25 years to the island Beijing claims as its own with a burst of military activity in surrounding waters, summoning the U.S. ambassador in Beijing and halting several agricultural imports from Taiwan.</p> <p>Pelosi arrived in Taiwan on Tuesday and left on Wednesday after pledging solidarity with the island and hailing its democracy.</p> <p>Taiwan Cabinet spokesman Lo Ping-cheng told a media briefing authorities had stepped security at key infrastructure including power plants and airports and increased the cyber security alertness level across government offices.</p> <p>Lo said Taiwan expects to be the target in coming days of increased "psychological warfare", which describes influence campaigns including misinformation to sway public opinion.</p> <p>"We are seeing psychological warfare that is stronger than ever before, and it will intensify in the coming days," Lo said.</p> <p>Taiwan officials have repeatedly warned about what they see as a Chinese campaign to weaken people's support for the government.</p> <p>China has never renounced using force to bring Taiwan under its control, which it has said is the most important issue in its relations with the United States. Taiwan rejects China's sovereignty claims and vows to defend itself.</p> <p>Lo urged the press in Taiwan not to act as a "propaganda tool" for Beijing and said they should be careful when citing reports by Chinese state media.</p> <p>Shortly after Pelosi's arrival late on Tuesday, Chinese state media reported China's Su-35 fighter jets were crossing the sensitive Taiwan Strait separating the island from China, before Taiwan's military called the report false.</p> <p>Digital minister Audrey Tang said cyber attacks on Taiwan government units on Tuesday surpassed 15,000 gigabits, 23 times higher than the previous daily record.</p>

	<p>Several government websites including the presidential office were subject to overseas cyber attacks, some of which authorities said were launched by China and Russia. read more</p> <p>Officials said planned Chinese military drills, starting from Thursday noon to midday on Sunday, would affect all 18 international flight routes near the capital Taipei.</p> <p>They said the impact, however, would be limited, with slight travel time increases as planes fly alternative routes.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Schools opt for ‘mastery-based learning’
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/education/lab/local-schools-opt-for-a-show-what-you-know-system-over-letter-grades/
GIST	<p>Misael Olivaras was late for his English class almost every day last school year. He was often too absorbed in his hands-on aircraft manufacturing coursework to attend one of his least favorite subjects.</p> <p>The soon-to-be senior at Elma High School — wedged between Aberdeen and Olympia — excels in math and applied manufacturing skills including measuring, drilling and using a dial caliper. His grade in English, on the other hand, “has been a steady C my entire school life.”</p> <p>But this summer, Olivaras doesn’t have to sweat a low English grade. He’s participating in mastery-based learning and will earn his remaining English credits, among others, through an apprenticeship working on aircraft.</p> <p>Mastery-based learning focuses on gaining and showing command of a topic, rather than receiving a grade and moving on. Often, students use innovative evaluations like presentations, group projects, cultural activities, tests or — like Olivaras — work experience. There are no letter grades or test scores.</p> <p>The practice will look different in each school and community. This summer, Enumclaw School District students took to the water in traditional cedar canoes as part of a “Healing of the Canoe” course.</p> <p>A handful of districts in Washington have been introducing mastery-based learning to their schools for years. With the support of a recent grant from the State Board of Education, more are jumping on board this year.</p> <p>In these classrooms, there are some key landmarks: Students guide their work plan, completing state requirements through the lens of their skills, interests or culture. Learning can take place inside or outside the classroom, and educators are encouraged to connect subjects like math, science, history or English.</p> <p>Students use portfolios, projects, demonstrations or tests to show what they know; feedback and help is provided by instructors. Students might revisit a concept in a variety of assignments before they meet state standards, or they might accomplish it in one go.</p> <p>For Olivaras, a big part of working at an aviation repair shop “is reading a bunch of documents, following all the steps, taking detailed notes.” These English skills are more helpful to his career goals than essay writing, he said. To earn English credits, he’ll be assessed on technical writing skills and his ability to follow technical manual instructions.</p> <p>“[It] is really focused on looking at students and recognizing the assets they bring from their unique cultures and communities,” said the State Board of Education’s Alissa Muller, who directs a new collaborative for the 14 participating districts. “So when you start connecting students’ learning and a school building to their real world, their communities, their cultures, that closes opportunity and achievement gaps.”</p> <p>Putting it to practice</p>

In Enumclaw, middle and high school students spent time this summer on the local Boise Falls Trail exploring biodiversity through the lens of the Muckleshoot tribal community culture. They paddled traditional canoes and learned the boats were originally made of old-growth cedars. Each ring of a cedar tree, like those tracing the canoes, represents a year of its life, so these trees shared air and breath with Muckleshoot ancestors dating back generations.

“The cool thing for me is getting them to understand that science doesn’t exist in a vacuum,” said Sui-Lan Ho’okano, the director of cultural programs for the Enumclaw School District and a Native Hawaiian.

This past school year, students at Northshore School District’s Innovation Lab researched missing and murdered Indigenous women in the state, writing biographies and creating artworks to honor them, and writing reports about potential interventions.

Mastery through time

While the concept of replacing traditional grading with mastery is novel to many, it was first outlined in the 1960s by educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom. During classroom visits, he observed students had equal time and instruction to learn a topic, even though some students needed extra support, which led to large variation in outcomes.

Those are often called achievement gaps. In Washington, 83% of students graduated on time this past school year, even though fewer than half of students met standards in English, math and science, as measured by standardized tests. But a range in student outcomes merely indicate whom a traditional teaching model best suited, rather than student’s capacity, Bloom’s research suggests. A focus on competency rather than scores or time in a seat could help.

Indigenous communities have long embraced competency-based learning.

“Hands-on, immersion style learning has always been in practice in Native and Indigenous communities since time immemorial,” Ho’okano said.

Interest in mastery heightened in the U.S. about a decade ago. Still, it remained a niche practice. Schools throughout New York City were among the early implementers and formed a collaborative in 2015; Idaho and Arizona also offer mastery-based learning today.

When the Washington Legislature expanded graduation pathways in 2019, it opened the door to mastery-based education. It tasked the State Board of Education with researching the model as well as barriers to local implementation. Since then, national interest has swelled amid pandemic-related learning challenges.

Earlier this year, the state’s first round of grant funds went to the Auburn, Enumclaw, Franklin Pierce, Highline and Northshore school districts, among others.

Measuring impact

There’s no conclusive data yet on whether mastery-based learning works. A 2020 review of the previous two decades of findings found mixed results, although that was likely because research was conducted too early on in the programs, researchers said.

Advocates say it shows potential. A recent study of New York high school graduates with mastery transcripts who were admitted to the City University of New York indicated these students were more likely than their peers to complete courses. They also received higher grades in their first college terms.

As part of Washington’s grant program, the state hired experts to evaluate its program. Muller said the funding period is too short to assess student impacts, but private funding or an extension of the program could allow for that.

While some Washington schools are still determining how grading and transcripts will work, Muller said there are organizations like the Mastery Transcript Consortium which can help. In May, directors of admissions at Washington's public four-year colleges and universities assured applicants with mastery transcripts they would not be disadvantaged for admissions.

"A lot of folks in the state see it as having the promise of eliminating the achievement gap," Muller said. "It's not a silver bullet; it's not the only way. But it's a really promising way that research is starting to support more and more."

Changing the process

The mastery trend is not just geared toward struggling students. The approach can also challenge students who excel and have idle time in class.

Muller said education platforms and technology used during the pandemic allow educators to prerecord lessons for students to move through freely, allowing them time to provide one-on-one support and projects as needed.

"It's actually more of a real work experience," said Peter Schurke, who was hired by the Northshore School District to develop its Innovation Lab High School, which is focused on mastery learning. "It's understanding that I'm not necessarily going to do this in one shot. I'm going to have to go through multiple iterations to get this to the high-quality product that I'm trying to produce, and it changes the entire thought process."

While Schurke said he has heard criticism that students won't try hard on the first attempt if they know they can try again, he said they quickly learn this approach doesn't benefit them, since people rarely want to repeat the same work.

Elma School District Superintendent Chris Nesmith imagines a pilot in training when he thinks of this approach. If they had an overall grade of a B, but received a D in landing, he would hope the student would continue working on landing skills until they improved.

In Enumclaw, the district has partnered with the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe to provide cultural opportunities relevant to students' lives that can be aligned with state learning standards. In past years, this helped students earn missed credits.

One student from a long line of Muckleshoot elders, or important community leaders, fulfilled a history standard by writing about his ancestors' role in the Fish Wars, a series of protests in the '60s and '70s in which Puget Sound Native communities fought for the U.S. government to recognize treaty-protected fishing rights.

Through his own history and culture, the student was able to show his knowledge, Ho'okano said, "and he narrated that so beautifully." The new state funding allows them to incorporate this style of schooling into lesson plans.

"Mastery based learning is not compartmentalized," she said. "It's a holistic learning."

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HEADLINE	08/03 OPEC Plus small increase oil production
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/08/03/business/economy-news-inflation-stocks#opec-plus-meeting
GIST	<p>The group of oil producers known as OPEC Plus on Wednesday approved a small increase in production, just over two weeks after President Biden visited Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia to seek assurances that the group would take action to cool oil markets.</p> <p>OPEC and its allies, which include Russia, said they would increase production by 100,000 barrels a day in September, far less than the nearly 650,000 barrels a day that the group agreed to add in July and</p>

August. OPEC Plus has now raised [output to roughly prepandemic levels](#), but global oil supply is still low, and high energy prices have led to skyrocketing inflation around the world.

As economic growth slows and central banks [raise interest rates](#) to fight inflation, concerns about weaker demand for energy may have discouraged the cartel from raising production significantly, analysts said. Ed Morse, the global head of commodities research at Citigroup, said that already, higher oil prices have dampened demand in the United States, Europe and Asia. “Demand is a significant part of the equation,” he said.

Oil prices rose immediately after the announcement but later traded flat. Oil prices are down from recent peaks, but remain high, buoyed by sanctions on the Russian economy, an OPEC Plus member, because of its invasion of Ukraine. Brent crude, the international benchmark, was about \$100 a barrel and West Texas Intermediate, the U.S. benchmark, was around \$94. A year ago, oil was trading at between \$60 and \$70 a barrel.

U.S. [officials have said they expected OPEC Plus](#), which is co-chaired by Russia, to lift output in the coming months. Mr. Morse said Mr. Biden probably went into the meeting with the crown prince understanding that Saudi Arabia, the de facto leader of OPEC, would not agree to any significant increase in production.

“If they’re going to be increasing dramatically, even up to their capacity level of just under or at 12 million barrels a day, they need a good 90 days’ preparation,” he said, to prepare pipelines, port facilities and marketing.

Caroline Bain, the chief commodities economist at Capital Economics, said that an increase from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the two OPEC countries with spare capacity, would help offset drops in production from Angola, Nigeria and Libya.

It’s still unclear what effect Western sanctions will have on Russia’s oil production, but output could fall significantly over the next year, not just as Russia struggles to find buyers for its crude, but also because of the lack of access to Western technology, spare parts or financing in some cases, she said.

OPEC Plus’s influence on oil markets has limits. Many of its 23 members are already missing production targets because of a lack of investment in production capacity.

Ms. Bain said increased output from the group, combined with lower demand because of a looming recession in Europe and a slowdown in the United States, would help drive prices lower, potentially to \$80 a barrel for Brent.

“We’ve not only got lower growth on the horizon, but we’ve also got high inflation, which is going to eat into disposable incomes and give people less money to spend on discretionary goods and travel,” she said. “If you’re a family of four, you maybe won’t go for a drive to the seaside because it’s going to cost so much.”

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HEADLINE	08/03 School districts ‘crisis’: teacher shortage
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/08/03/school-teacher-shortage/
GIST	<p>Rural school districts in Texas are switching to four-day weeks this fall due to lack of staff. Florida is asking veterans with no teaching background to enter classrooms. Arizona is allowing college students to step in and instruct children.</p> <p>The teacher shortage in America has hit crisis levels — and school officials everywhere are scrambling to ensure that, as students return to classrooms, someone will be there to educate them.</p>

“I have never seen it this bad,” Dan Domenech, executive director of the School Superintendents Association, said of the teacher shortage. “Right now it’s number one on the list of issues that are concerning school districts ... necessity is the mother of invention, and hard-pressed districts are going to have to come up with some solutions.”

It is hard to know exactly how many U.S. classrooms are short of teachers for the 2022-2023 school year; no national database precisely tracks the issue. But state- and district-level reports have emerged across the country detailing staffing gaps that stretch from the hundreds to the thousands — and remain wide open as summer winds rapidly to a close.

The Nevada State Education Association estimated that roughly 3,000 teaching jobs [remained unfilled](#) across the state’s 17 school districts as of early August. In a [January report](#), the Illinois Association of Regional School Superintendents found that 88 percent of school districts statewide were having “problems with teacher shortages” — while 2,040 teacher openings were either empty or filled with a “less than qualified” hire. And in the Houston area, the largest five school districts are all reporting that [between 200 and 1,000 teaching positions remain open](#).

Carlton Jenkins, superintendent of the Madison Metropolitan School District in Wisconsin, said teachers are so scarce that superintendents across the country have developed a whisper network to alert each other when educators move between states.

“We’re at a point right now, where if I have people who want to move to California, I call up and give a reference very quick,” he said. “And if someone is coming from another place — say, Minnesota — I have superintendent colleagues in Minnesota, they call and say, ‘Hey, I have teachers coming your way.’ ”

Why are America’s schools so short-staffed? Experts point to a confluence of factors including pandemic-induced teacher exhaustion, low pay and some educators’ sense that politicians and parents — and sometimes their own school board members — have little respect for their profession amid an escalating educational culture war that has seen many districts and states pass policies and laws restricting what teachers can say about U.S. history, race, racism, gender and sexual orientation, as well as LGBTQ issues.

“The political situation in the United States, combined with legitimate aftereffects of covid, has created this shortage,” said Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers. “This shortage is contrived.”

The stopgap solutions for lack of staff run the gamut, from offering teachers better pay to increasing the pool of people who qualify as educators to bumping up class sizes. But many of these temporary fixes are likely to harm students by diminishing their ability to learn, predicted Dawn Etcheverry, president of the Nevada State Education Association.

“When you start to double classes, teachers don’t have that one-on-one with the students, that personal ability to understand what the student needs” — both academically and socially, Etcheverry said.

Danika Mills, a former school-based therapist and state director of Unite Us, a technology company that connects health and social services providers, said this diminishment in the quality of education is coming at the worst possible moment. America’s schoolchildren are still struggling to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, she said, and the havoc months of online learning [wreaked on students’ academic progress, social skills and mental health](#).

“We know students of all ages suffered steep declines in academic achievement during the pandemic and now is the time to course-correct those changes,” Mills said. “Instead, I think and fear we may be facing an even bigger decline.”

Nevada’s Clark County School District, which [serves 320,000 students](#), is one of many school systems taking a scattershot approach to staff shortages by trying several solutions at once. In hopes of shrinking

its roughly 1,300 teaching vacancies, the district has [raised the starting teacher salary by](#) \$7,000 and is offering a \$4,000 “relocation bonus” to new teachers who move from out of state or more than 100 miles. In an interview, Superintendent Jesus F. Jara said the district is also granting employees a “retention bonus” of up to \$5,000 for staying in their jobs.

But, with school slated to start in a week, the district is still only 92 percent staffed, Jara said. And — despite “around-the-clock” efforts from his human resources team — he does not believe the district will close the gap in time.

“I’m still worried, I am still losing sleep at night, and I’m not going to fill the rest of the 8 percent of our classrooms by Monday,” Jara said.

Come [Aug. 8](#), the district will be forced to deploy patching measures, Jara said — including pulling administrators from the central office to work as substitutes and combining multiple classes together in large spaces such as auditoriums or gymnasiums.

“Band-aid-wise, I think they’re doing whatever they can,” said Jeff Horn, executive director of the Clark County Association of School Administrators. “It’s a mess.”

Other districts and states are attempting more unorthodox fixes. A new state law in Arizona, [signed by Gov. Doug Ducey \(R\) last month](#), allows college students to take teaching jobs. A similar law, which took effect in Florida on July 1, [offers K-12 teaching jobs to military veterans who served for at least four years](#). The veterans do not need bachelor’s degrees but must have earned at least 60 college credits while maintaining a grade-point average of at least 2.5.

Andrew Spar, president of the Florida Education Association, said the need for teachers in his state is dire: His association estimates there are at least 8,000 teacher vacancies this year, up from 5,000 the year before. But Spar does not believe the veterans program is “really a solution,” as it may lead to unqualified individuals entering classrooms.

“I think we all appreciate what our military veterans have done for our country in terms of protecting our freedoms both here and abroad,” he said. “But just because you were in the military does not mean you will be a great teacher.”

Meanwhile, the school board and superintendent in Arizona’s Tucson Independent School District are considering making up for a dearth of math teachers — the system is missing 24 of them, along with 102 other teachers — by sending a small number of students into online learning for part of the day. The district may hire virtual math teachers from a Chicago-based online education company, [the Tucson Sentinel reported](#). The superintendent did not respond to a request for comment.

And in Texas’s Mineral Wells Independent School District and Chico Independent School District, officials have switched to a four-day school week for the upcoming academic year. In both districts, which are small and rural, school leaders said the change is meant to attract and retain teachers amid significant staff shortages, [the Texas Tribune reported](#). Neither district responded to a request for comment.

In Wisconsin’s Madison school district, superintendent Jenkins said that, a month away from the start of school on Sept. 1, officials are still working to fill [199 teacher vacancies and 124 non-teaching positions](#). But no children will lack an adult in the classroom come fall, he said, because the district has managed to recruit 269 qualified substitute teachers — primarily by raising substitute pay rates this spring. Jenkins said he hopes that, over the course of the year, the district can convince at least some of these substitutes to convert to full-time teachers.

“We’re just going to go after them,” Jenkins said. Initial enticements will include “some immediate supplies. Every teacher likes their calendar, right? So we’re providing calendars, little things for them — and we have some other things planned that I don’t want to reveal, because I don’t want to ruin the surprise.”

	<p>In Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia’s largest district, Superintendent Michelle Reid said 97 percent of teaching positions are filled about three weeks before the semester begins.</p> <p>Reid said the district of nearly 179,000 students is now making an “all-hands-on-deck” effort to fill those jobs.</p> <p>“We are recruiting and processing applications and hiring educators around-the-clock, really,” she said. “It’s our intent to continue to recruit and hire teachers daily as we approach the start of the school year.”</p> <p>Nonetheless, the district has begun developing backup plans, Reid said. Although the details vary campus to campus, one possible strategy is to send administrators with teaching licenses back into classrooms — but “we hope we will not have to utilize that.”</p> <p>Leslie Houston, president of the Fairfax Education Association, said she has never in her career seen so many teachers leaving the job because they feel disrespected, primarily by politicians and some parents.</p> <p>“When people were beating up on teachers and just being real nasty about what we’re doing and what we’re not doing,” Houston said, “I don’t think they were really thinking, ‘Who will teach my children?’ ”</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Pelosi hails Taiwan: model for democracy
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/aug/3/nancy-pelosi-hails-taiwan-model-democracy-and-econ/
GIST	<p>House Speaker Nancy Pelosi hailed Taiwan as a model for democracy and a “strong contrast to what’s happening on mainland China” as she met Wednesday with President Tsai Ing-wen as part of her high-stakes visit to the island.</p> <p>Mrs. Pelosi pledged to maintain U.S. solidarity with Taiwan, which Beijing considers a breakaway province, while preserving the “one China” policy that American leaders have maintained for decades to avoid tumult in the region.</p> <p>“Our solidarity with you is more important than ever, as you defend Taiwan and their freedom,” she said.</p> <p>Earlier Wednesday, Mrs. Pelosi was even more forceful in her defense of Taiwan as she received a civilian honor from the president known as the Order of Propitious Clouds.</p> <p>“Our delegation, [of] which I’m very proud, came to Taiwan to make unequivocally clear: We will not abandon our commitment to Taiwan, and we’re proud of our enduring friendship,” she said.</p> <p>The speaker lifted up the Taiwanese people and hailed their accomplishments while trying to limit any punishment from the mainland. Furious over the visit, China hit with cyberattacks and import restrictions as punishment for hosting a prominent U.S. leader.</p> <p>“We’re not here to talk about mainland China,” she said. “We’re here to talk about Taiwan.”</p> <p>She said lawmakers visited the island earlier this year without much “fuss” and her visit should be a net positive for the island.</p> <p>Mrs. Pelosi pointed to the Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors (CHIPS) and Science Act as a new law that will spur economic growth in both countries.</p> <p>“This is something that opens the door for us to, again, have good, better economic exchanges,” she said. “I know that some Taiwan businesses, significant ones, are already planning to invest in manufacturing in the United States.”</p>

Mrs. Pelosi theorized that Chinese President Xi Jinping is saber-rattling because he has “insecurities” about his own political situation.

“I think that whatever China was going to do, they will do in their own good time. What excuse they may use to do it is another thing, but you really know more about that than I do,” she said.

The speaker also said China should not stand in the way of future visits by American dignitaries but said it has been difficult to host foreign leaders in Congress, citing COVID-19 for the lack of joint sessions.

“I just hope that it’s really clear that while China has stood in the way of Taiwan participating and going to certain meetings, that they understand that they will not stand in the way of people coming to Taiwan. It’s a show of friendship, of support, but also a source of learning about how we can work together better in collaboration,” she said.

Mrs. Pelosi used her remarks to focus on Taiwan as a positive force in the struggle between democracy and autocracy and complimented the island for being technologically advanced.

She also pointed to its relative success in boxing out the coronavirus through a savvy public health response.

“Probably one of the highest rates of vaccination, but also the lowest number of deaths from COVID. A real model for the world,” she said. “It’s about science, but it’s also about community acceptance of a plan. And that is called leadership.”

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HEADLINE	08/03 Abruptly called nuclear talks: Iran, US, EU
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/aug/3/iran-us-eu-to-send-envoys-to-vienna-for-nuclear-ta/
GIST	<p>TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran, the United States and the European Union said Wednesday they would send representatives to Vienna amid what appears to be a last-ditch effort at reviving talks over Tehran’s tattered 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.</p> <p>It wasn’t immediately clear if other parties to the landmark accord would attend the surprise summit, nor if there had been any progress after a monthslong stalemate and fruitless round of indirect talks between Iran and the U.S. in Doha.</p> <p>The European Union official who chairs the talks, Enrique Mora, wrote on Twitter that the negotiations would focus on the most recent draft on restoring the agreement, while Tehran said it was dispatching nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani to the Austrian capital.</p> <p>U.S. Special Representative for Iran Rob Malley was expected to go to Vienna for the talks on Thursday, two American officials said. They spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the plans before they were announced.</p> <p>The prospects of the deal’s restoration have darkened in the past few months with major sticking points remaining, including Tehran’s demand that Washington provide guarantees that it won’t again quit the pact and that it lift terrorism sanctions on Iran’s paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.</p> <p>The abruptly called meeting in Vienna comes after EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell has repeatedly pushed to break the deadlock and salvage the deal in past weeks. He recently wrote in The Financial Times that “the space for additional significant compromises has been exhausted.”</p> <p>Former President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the 2015 deal, which lifted most international sanctions on Tehran in exchange for tight restrictions on Iran’s nuclear program. Since then, Iran has massively expanded its nuclear work and now has enough highly enriched uranium to fuel one nuclear weapon, according to nonproliferation experts.</p>

	However, Iran still would need to design a bomb and a delivery system for it, likely a monthslong project. Iran insists its program is for peaceful purposes, though U.N. experts and Western intelligence agencies say Iran had an organized military nuclear program through 2003.
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HEADLINE	08/03 Military tensions rise as Pelosi departs
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-pelosi-leaves-taiwan-chinas-military-looms-larger-11659531357?mod=hp_lead_pos1
GIST	<p>U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi departed Taiwan after a whirlwind trip that raised military tensions over the island to their highest level in more than two decades, an escalation that is set to persist long after she returns home.</p> <p>By the time Mrs. Pelosi (D., Calif.) wrapped up a day of meetings with Taiwan's president, senior lawmakers, executives and human-rights activists and left Taiwan on Wednesday, China's navy had already maneuvered into position for large live-fire drills that will encircle the island beginning Thursday.</p> <p>Mrs. Pelosi's visit sought to reinforce what she said was America's ironclad commitment to preserving Taiwan's democracy. Yet the trip also brings Beijing's military activity into what Taipei claims as its territorial waters, according to Taipei's Defense Ministry, raising the prospect of greater pressure on an island that is the most sensitive flashpoint in U.S.-China relations.</p> <p>"The proximity of the exercises to Taiwan could become the new norm," said J. Michael Cole, a Taipei-based senior adviser with the International Republican Institute, a nonprofit whose board includes Republican Party heavyweights. He described it as "salami-slicing" that aims to constrain the spaces where Taiwan can operate.</p> <p>Mrs. Pelosi, the most senior U.S. official to visit Taiwan in a quarter-century, framed her visit as part of a broader struggle over the future of democracy.</p> <p>"Today the world faces a choice between democracy and autocracy," Mrs. Pelosi said in a meeting with Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen. "America's determination to preserve democracy here in Taiwan and around the world remains ironclad."</p> <p>Beijing worries the U.S. is backing away from longstanding agreements over the status of Taiwan, which could unsettle the balance of cross-strait relations and make military conflict more likely.</p> <p>China's Foreign Ministry warned of countermeasures to come against the U.S. and Taiwan in response to the visit.</p> <p>"The relevant measures will be firm, powerful and effective," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said Wednesday at a daily press briefing. "The United States and Taiwan's independence forces will continue to feel it."</p> <p>On Wednesday, China announced new bans on imports of Taiwanese citrus and other food, saying it detected pests, excessive pesticide residue and Covid-19 in recent shipments.</p> <p>The most serious risks could stem from maneuvers being carried out by China's People's Liberation Army. The PLA said naval, aerial, strategic-missile and other forces conducted joint training on Wednesday to the north, southwest and southeast of Taiwan prior to the live-fire drills that are slated to begin Thursday. Those drills will involve the use of long-range weapons and conventional missiles.</p> <p>Analysts said the coordinates of the areas affected by the drills show they could intrude into Taiwan's claimed territorial waters in the north near the capital, Taipei, and the port of Keelung, as well as in the south near the key port city of Kaohsiung.</p>

One of the areas is to the east of the island, where the PLA said the drills would involve the use of conventional missiles. Depending on the launch sites and missile types, experts say, the PLA projectiles could fly over Taiwan—a gesture that would be seen as a major escalation.

Western defense analysts said China's show of force appears far more extensive than what it deployed in the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, the tensest standoff between Chinese and American forces in recent decades. That showdown was set off, in part, by Taiwan's then-president traveling to the U.S.

"These announced exercises are not only unprecedented in scope but also likely in scale," said M. Taylor Fravel, a professor and director of the MIT Security Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Whereas the 1995-1996 drills focused on amphibious assaults, this week's exercises seem aimed at showcasing the PLA's ability to blockade Taiwan and conduct joint operations with air, sea and land-based forces.

On Wednesday, Taiwan's defense ministry said China sent 27 warplanes near its airspace, the highest daily tally since June 21. It said 22 of the planes crossed the median line in the Taiwan Strait—a notional boundary widely seen as dividing mainland and Taiwanese areas of control—a provocative gesture that Beijing rarely makes.

China's forceful response is partly due to the timing of Mrs. Pelosi's visit, coming just before the Communist Party's twice-a-decade congress this fall, where leader Xi Jinping is expected to break with recent precedent to secure a third term in power. Meanwhile, the country's economy has buckled under the pressure of widespread Covid-19 lockdowns and a sharp downturn in sentiment in the housing sector. The country's top governing body last week effectively set aside China's 5.5% growth target for the year in light of the weakness.

"Whether it's certain insecurities on the part of the president of China as to his own political situation, that he's rattling his saber, I don't know," Mrs. Pelosi said, without naming Mr. Xi. "But it doesn't really matter. What matters to us is that we salute the successes of Taiwan."

Ms. Hua, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, said Mrs. Pelosi's visit was a provocative violation of China's sovereignty and an attempt by the House speaker to score political points.

While the U.S. says there has been no change in its Taiwan policy, U.S. lawmakers have made high-profile visits in recent months, and President Biden has repeatedly suggested the U.S. would intervene if China were to attack Taiwan, comments the White House has subsequently walked back. Some Western analysts warn that such moves could embolden advocates of Taiwan independence and push the region closer to conflict.

China claims Taiwan as part of its sovereign territory. The island functions separately from the mainland, with a robust economy, competitive elections and a lively independent media. While the U.S. and most other countries don't recognize Taiwan as a sovereign state, the U.S. is required by law to provide Taiwan with the means to defend itself and opposes any attempt by the mainland to take it over by force.

Under Mr. Xi's rule, U.S. officials say China has become more aggressive toward Taiwan, flexing its growing military power with greater frequency, including sending repeated sorties of warplanes toward the island. Ms. Tsai likened the situation in Taiwan to that between Ukraine and Russia.

"Russia's invasion of Ukraine earlier this year has made security over the Taiwan Strait another focus of worldwide attention," she said Wednesday. "We will do whatever it takes to strengthen Taiwan's self-defense capability."

On the military front, Beijing has in recent years ramped up what experts call "gray-zone warfare" against Taiwan—a series of operations aimed at intimidating the island and wearing down its defenses without

resorting to open conflict. It comprises amphibious-assault drills, naval patrols and warplane sorties alongside nonmilitary methods such as cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns and diplomatic pressure.

The near-constant stream of PLA aircraft and warships operating near Taiwan has forced the island's military to intercept them at a taxing pace, raising fuel and maintenance costs and wearing out personnel and equipment.

Even so, some Chinese scholars cautioned against overblowing the risk of war over Taiwan, saying there is still ample room for diplomacy.

"It's not like a military conflict is imminent," said Dingding Chen, a professor of international relations at China's Jinan University. "It's far from that."

Mrs. Pelosi received a hearty welcome throughout her visit to Taiwan. Her arrival was met with rapturous applause by hundreds of onlookers, while Taiwan's tallest building beamed a welcome message in lights. Her arrival, however, also drew demonstrations by a few dozen pro-Beijing supporters, who gathered outside a Taipei hotel to protest. And Taiwan's government said a computer hack caused some screens at convenience stores and a railway station to display anti-Pelosi messages.

One reason many people in Taiwan object to coming under Beijing's rule is China's record on human rights. Such concerns have been reinforced by the recent deterioration of rights in Hong Kong under a security crackdown driven by Beijing.

On Wednesday afternoon, Mrs. Pelosi met with several pro-democracy activists with ties to Hong Kong, Tibet and mainland China at Taiwan's National Human Rights Museum. Among them was Wu'er Kaixi, who co-led the 1989 student protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Mrs. Pelosi visited the Chinese capital two years later and unfurled a banner commemorating those who died there, angering Beijing.

Outside the museum, which was surrounded by a heavy police presence, supporters of Mrs. Pelosi faced off against several dozen pro-Beijing protesters upset by her presence in Taiwan.

Mrs. Pelosi also met with the vice president of Taiwan's legislature, where she emphasized the trip's peaceful motives and highlighted opportunities for cooperation on areas including security, economics and governance.

At one point in that meeting, Mrs. Pelosi appeared to refer to Taiwan as a country, a reference that could further agitate Beijing. Mrs. Pelosi said the U.S. could learn from Taiwan—"how you address the Covid crisis, how we advance respect for all of the people in our countries as we go forward."

The U.S. adheres to a "One China" policy that acknowledges—but doesn't endorse—the claims by Beijing over Taiwan. Mrs. Pelosi's office said Tuesday that her trip didn't contradict longstanding U.S. policy regarding Taiwan.

Asked about these comments, Ms. Hua, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, said: "Taiwan has never been a country. Historically and legally speaking, it's always been a province of the People's Republic of China."

Mrs. Pelosi's visit to Taiwan has dominated social media in China. While many users voiced support for the coming military drills, others urged caution. As Mrs. Pelosi arrived late Tuesday, the volume of discussion on Weibo, one of China's most popular social-media platforms, was so large at one point that many users reported trouble loading the website and opening the mobile app.

A robust police presence was stationed outside the U.S. Embassy in Beijing on Wednesday morning. Dozens of uniformed and plainclothes police lined the fortified street in the capital's embassy district. The heavier-than-usual level of security appeared determined to ensure that online discontent over the visit wouldn't spill into the sort of violent street protests that have targeted other embassies previously.

	<p>Beijing was otherwise calm. Many people have been more concerned about often draconian Covid-19 restrictions that have left the economy sputtering. Despite the tensions over Taiwan, U.S. brands and pop culture remain widely popular.</p> <p>Just up the road from the U.S. Embassy, Li Yuelong, a 38-year-old engineer, said the U.S. had been a great help to China in its development in recent decades, from both an economic as well as technological perspective.</p> <p>The U.S. should be more tolerant of China, Mr. Li said. He feared fighting over Taiwan would hurt ordinary people the most.</p> <p>"I don't want a war between the two sides," Mr. Li said.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/04 Australia bad flu season: warning for US
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/australia-flu-season-warning-sign-us-this-year-rcna40123
GIST	<p>The U.S. may be in for a severe flu season this year if trends in the Southern Hemisphere — historically a seasonal harbinger for the U.S. — hold true.</p> <p>It isn't the first time since the Covid pandemic began that experts have warned of a bad flu season or even a "twindemic": a bad flu season on top of a winter surge of Covid. But so far, that hasn't materialized.</p> <p>What makes this year different, however, is that flu is surging in Australia for the first time since the pandemic began. Flu season in Australia can be an indication of what's to come in the U.S.</p> <p>Australia is nearing the end of its worst flu season in five years, according to the latest report from the country's Department of Health and Aged Care.</p> <p>"We watch the all of the Southern Hemisphere countries very closely, hoping that we get some sort of insight, but it's not perfect by any means," said Dr. Alicia Fry, the chief of the Epidemiology and Prevention Branch of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>Still, she said, the CDC is "very alert" for signs of an early and/or aggressive flu season in the U.S. Up to 41 million people catch the flu every year, on average, resulting in about 52,000 deaths, according to the CDC.</p> <p>Warning signs for winter</p> <p>Flu season in Australia began earlier than usual, which can be an indicator of a severe season.</p> <p>"The earlier it starts, the worse it tends to be," said Dr. Robert Citronberg, the executive medical director of infectious disease and prevention for Advocate Aurora Health in Illinois. That is mostly a function of time — the longer the flu circulates, the more damage it will do in a population.</p> <p>Australia's flu season has also hit children hardest, according to the country's health agency. Kids ages 5 through 9 have had the highest rate of flu cases this year, followed by children ages 4 and younger and teenagers.</p> <p>Australian health authorities say it's too soon to tell whether their flu vaccine has proven to be a good match for circulating influenza strains.</p> <p>The flu shots that will be offered in the U.S. this year will protect against two strains of influenza A and two strains of influenza B.</p> <p>How a vulnerable population can prepare</p>

Usually, people are exposed to a variety of flu strains every year, which helps to build up immunity to the virus.

But with little flu in the past two seasons, that immunity has waned. Young children in particular may be most at risk, experts said, because their immune systems have had even less exposure to the virus.

"There are a lot of young kids who have not had flu at all over the past couple of years," said Dr. James Cutrell, an infectious disease expert at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas. "That's going to make them more susceptible to get it and then to spread it to other people."

Cutrell said that people shouldn't panic about the coming flu season but that "it is time for people to prepare."

That mainly involves staying up to date on vaccines for both the flu and Covid.

Protection against one viral infection can help protect against the other, and vice versa, said Dr. Robert Citronberg, the executive medical director of infectious disease and prevention for Advocate Aurora Health.

Both Covid and influenza can cause "significant lung inflammation," Citronberg said. "Once you have lung inflammation, you're more susceptible to other infections or pathogens."

Doctors offices and pharmacies in the U.S. will be getting flu vaccine shipments in the coming weeks. Fry of the CDC said the best time for most people to get the shot is in September or October.

Two groups in particular should get them earlier if possible, she said: young children who will need two shots this year and women in their third trimesters of pregnancy.

"It's a good idea to get the vaccine before they deliver so that the baby gets some of the antibodies that Mom develops and the baby's protected," Fry said. Infants aren't eligible for flu shots until age 6 months.

According to the CDC, children younger than age 9 who have never had flu shots should get two doses this year, at least four weeks apart.

In addition, kids in that age group who got only one shot during previous flu seasons may also need two shots this year.

Historically, however, Americans don't rush to get their flu shots. Just about half of the U.S. population got the shot during the 2020-21 season, the CDC reported. And while there is no guarantee the shots will prevent infection, studies have shown they can reduce the risk of dying or ending up in the hospital with severe flu.

"Flu is not completely preventable by the vaccine, but it's controllable," Citronberg said. "If we get a significantly fewer number of people getting vaccinated this year for flu, then it could really impact how many cases we have and the severity of those cases."

If that occurs, Citronberg predicted, "we're going to have our hands full."

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HEADLINE	08/03 Course correction monkeypox response
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/white-house-scrambles-play-catch-monkeypox-response-rcna41305
GIST	WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is undergoing a course correction in its response to the monkeypox outbreak after weeks of logistical and bureaucratic delays providing testing, treatments and vaccines.

Biden officials acknowledge they are now playing catch-up as case numbers grow faster than initially expected, said people close to the administration, noting the number of infections has jumped from dozens to thousands in a short amount of time.

As part of its new approach, the administration is working to drastically increase the number of people vaccinated against monkeypox and improve access to an experimental treatment for those infected, in addition to naming a monkeypox coordinator to manage the response from the White House across agencies and with state and local governments.

Still, the administration faces a maze of obstacles, according to a dozen doctors on the frontlines and former public health officials who spoke with NBC News.

"I feel like we still have the opportunity to continue to control this, but it's really a matter of getting the resources," said Julie Morita, who advised President Joe Biden on Covid during the transition and led the Chicago Department of Public Health for nearly two decades.

"Public health needs to be resourced adequately, the vaccine supply needs to be increased, and communication efforts really need to be ramped up. But all those things can happen and can lead to control of this outbreak. It's not too late," Morita said.

This week, New York and California were among numerous states that declared public health emergencies, while the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported infections in all but two states. According to an NBC News analysis of CDC data, the seven-day average of reported new cases increased from 45 on July 11 to 214 just two weeks later.

In total, the U.S. has reported nearly 6,000 cases since the beginning of May. The total worldwide exceeds 20,000.

With the virus currently spreading almost entirely among men who have sex with men, the administration's strategy has largely been focused on vaccinating the most high-risk individuals, which include men who have had multiple male partners in a two-week period or those with known exposure.

More recently, though, administration officials have urged other men who have sex with men to cut down on high-risk behavior, like having multiple partners, until the outbreak is under control. They're attempting to get that word out to gay, transexual and bisexual communities through dating apps, at events and engagement with community leaders.

That's a shift in strategy from earlier in the summer when officials were focused on vaccinating only those who had been infected and their close contacts. But as infections ballooned in the past month, state and local health officials were not able to keep pace with the rate of infections, said a person familiar with the efforts.

The White House on Tuesday appointed Robert Fenton the national monkeypox response coordinator, with Demetre Daskalakis as deputy coordinator. The two will hold their first press briefing on the response efforts Thursday.

"The President is always looking at ways we can do more to stop the spread of Monkeypox," said an administration official. "And by having Bob Fenton and Dr. Daskalakis at the helm as White House coordinators, we will ramp up our urgent, whole of government response even more."

The federal government has said it plans to ship more than 700,000 doses to states, on top of the 300,000 already allocated, but officials haven't detailed plans for any additional doses.

"Once the data showed that this outbreak was different than past ones and transmitting rapidly, we scaled up our comprehensive response, rapidly accelerating timelines to make over one million doses of vaccines available," the administration official said.

Doctors and public health officials say doses of the vaccine have been slow to arrive, and doctors are concerned there won't be enough to meet demand, driven in part now from those at lower risk of getting infected, like health care workers and men in monogamous relationships.

In San Francisco, local officials requested 35,000 doses for the city but so far have only around 12,000 doses, said Tyler Temeer, CEO of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation. His clinic has 10,000 people on a waiting list and has gotten just over 1,000 doses, he said.

For the vaccine to be most effective, a person needs to receive two doses.

In New York City, demand has also far outstripped supply. But among one key group where infections have been particularly high — Black men who have sex with other men — demand has been low, said Celine Gounder, an infectious disease specialist in New York. She said more work needs to be done to reach those most at risk, many of whom lack health insurance, don't have a primary care doctor or are stigmatized for having sex with other men.

"What we're seeing among cases is that some 30% to 40% of cases are in men of color or trans women of color, and yet, if you look at who's lining up for vaccination, the vast majority is white men, whether it's in New York City where I am or my colleagues down in Atlanta, we are seeing the same thing play out," said Gounder. "And that is a concern because you're not reaching that high risk population."

Some states may also see a delay in getting their vaccine doses because the federal government has said it won't ship a state's full allotment of vaccines until they begin sharing data on infection rates and demographics, something some states argue they can't do because of privacy laws, said Marcus Plescia, chief medical officer for the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.

For those who do get infected, doctors say they face hours of paperwork in order to get access to a smallpox treatment called Tpoxx that's believed to work on monkeypox patients. That process has discouraged some providers from treating monkeypox patients, Gounder and other doctors said.

The federal government has tried to streamline the process, but because Tpoxx isn't approved by the Food and Drug Administration for treating monkeypox, government officials want to ensure they are getting data on who is receiving it to gauge its safety and effectiveness, said a person familiar with the process.

Public officials and doctors said they are pushing for the White House to declare a public health emergency, a move that could free up Covid funding to be used for monkeypox, remove some administrative barriers to accessing Tpoxx and improve data sharing between states and the federal government.

"The declaration of a federal public health emergency will help alleviate some of the problems we currently have, but resources must follow," said David Harvey, executive director of the National Coalition of STD Directors.

Internally, frustrations over the administration's response have led to some finger-pointing between the White House and Department of Health and Human Services, said people close to the administration.

The White House has said it will let Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra decide whether to declare a public health emergency.

Many of the issues doctors and health officials have been grappling with around the response to monkeypox are similar to those faced during the Covid pandemic — a lack of testing, mixed messaging

and not enough vaccines to meet demand. While monkeypox is a much different virus than Covid — it is believed to be spread mostly through skin-to-skin contact, not through the air — it has highlighted the flaws that remain in the government's ability to respond to new outbreaks.

“We’re not fundamentally set up in public health for crisis response,” said Andy Slavitt, who led the White House response to Covid during Biden’s first year in office. “And we’ve got a very beleaguered public health system to boot. Those are things that Congress needs to fix, that those within the administration needs to fix. There are big requests for that work, and there are reforms that need to happen.”

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HEADLINE	08/03 China most companies on Fortune 500
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/walmart-tops-fortune-500-list-of-biggest-companies-for-ninth-consecutive-year/
GIST	<p>Walmart is the world's largest company by revenue for the ninth consecutive year, and for the 17th time since Fortune magazine began ranking companies by size in 1995.</p> <p>Fortune on Wednesday released its annual Fortune Global 500 list, a ranking of the largest and most profitable corporations worldwide. Saudi Aramco, the sixth-largest company in the world by revenue, is now the globe's most profitable company, with \$105 billion in earnings, according to Fortune.</p> <p>In 2021, businesses of all sizes faced an uphill climb overcoming financial setbacks triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, they face new challenges, including inflation, looming fears of a recession and Russia's war in Ukraine.</p> <p>"A rebound from the worst depths of the pandemic created a huge tailwind for the world's largest companies by revenue," Fortune list editor Scott DeCarlo said in a statement. "Aggregate sales and profits hit record levels in fiscal year 2021 for the Fortune Global 500."</p> <p>Fortune editor-in-chief Alyson Shontell also warned of the challenges ahead for businesses as the economy slows.</p> <p>"For businesses of every size, the real test will be who can survive and thrive in tough conditions like these, especially if — or when — a recession of unknown length and depth settles in," she said.</p> <p>Walmart, the nation's largest retailer, saw its shares slide last month after the company told investors to expect lower profits for the rest of 2022 as high inflation limits consumers' ability to spend on discretionary items, like furniture and electronics.</p> <p>China flexes corporate muscles</p> <p>China, including Hong Kong, had 136 companies on Fortune's largest companies list — the most of any nation. The U.S. ranked second, with 124, while Japan was third with 47. And for the first time in the history of the rankings, the aggregate revenue of listed companies based in Chinese-speaking countries surpassed that of U.S. companies on the list.</p> <p>The total combined revenues of Fortune 500 companies rose 19% over last year to \$37.8 trillion — the equivalent of more than one-third of global GDP. Cumulative profits were up 88% over last year, reaching a record \$3.1 trillion. The listed companies have a total of nearly 70 million employees around the world.</p> <p>E-commerce giant Amazon landed at No. 2 on the list, with Chinese-state owned electric company State Grid claiming the third spot. Tech company Apple ranked No.7, and pharmacy chain CVS Health ranked No.10. CVS Health was the only corporation in the top 10 with a female CEO, Karen Lynch.</p> <p>Here are the top 10 companies on this year's Fortune 500 by revenue (see the complete rankings):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Walmart (U.S.)

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Amazon (U.S.) 3. State Grid (China) 4. China National Petroleum (China) 5. Sinopec Group (China) 6. Saudi Aramco (Saudi Arabia) 7. Apple (U.S.) 8. Volkswagen (Germany) 9. China State Construction Engineering (China) 10. CVS Health (U.S.)
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HEADLINE	08/03 Germany: Covid measures for fall, winter
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/germany-announces-coronavirus-measures-fall-winter-87871818
GIST	<p>BERLIN -- The German government on Wednesday said basic coronavirus requirements would remain in place during the coming fall and winter, when experts expect COVID-19 cases to rise again as people spend more time indoors.</p> <p>Face masks and presenting proof of a negative coronavirus test will be mandatory from October until early April at hospitals, nursing homes and similar institutions with vulnerable people.</p> <p>Passengers on airplanes and making long-distance trips by train and bus also will have to wear masks during that period, as they do now.</p> <p>However, Germany's 16 states have the authority to adopt their own rules depending on how severely the virus affects their areas. State governments could decide to require masks on local public transportation, in schools for students in fifth grade and up, and at public indoor events.</p> <p>Community facilities such as schools, prisons or asylum-seeker shelters may implement regular testing again if COVID-19 case numbers rise, Germany's health and justice ministers said in a joint statement. The government also plans a fall vaccination campaign.</p> <p>“Germany should be better prepared for the next coronavirus winter than in previous years,” Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said.</p> <p>Justice Minister Marco Buschmann said a special effort would be made to keep schools open, while states will “only be able to impose a mask requirement at schools if this is necessary in order to be able to continue to provide in-person teaching.”</p> <p>“Children have a right to school education and a school day that is as carefree as possible. School closures must therefore not be allowed,” Buschmann said.</p> <p>The new regulations still need to go to Cabinet and parliament for approval but are expected to pass.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Global Covid cases drop 9%, deaths stable
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/covid-cases-drop-globally-week-deaths-stable-87881052
GIST	<p>LONDON -- New coronavirus cases fell 9% globally last week while deaths remained stable, according to the latest weekly assessment of the pandemic released Wednesday by the World Health Organization.</p> <p>The U.N. health agency said there were 6.5 million cases reported last week with more than 14,000 deaths. WHO said the number of new cases fell 35% in Europe but increased about 20% in the Western Pacific and 5% in Africa. Deaths rose 44% in the Western Pacific and 26% in the Middle East, while falling about a quarter in Europe.</p>

WHO has previously warned that recent surveillance of COVID-19 has been severely compromised by countries reducing their testing, reporting and other coronavirus alert systems. The agency has said COVID-19 figures are likely being significantly underestimated, which could make it more difficult to spot any worrisome new variants.

In the U.K., the Office for National Statistics reported last week that COVID-19 cases dropped to about 1 in 20 people in England infected, suggesting that the latest wave of the coronavirus may have peaked in the country.

Dr. Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at the University of East Anglia, said it was likely that COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations would continue to fall further in the following weeks.

Other experts warned that measures to prevent COVID-19 should still be taken, saying the health system was still under pressure.

"We have to hope that the incidence of long COVID from this wave will be lower than in the first and second waves," said James Naismith, director of the Rosalind Franklin Institute at the University of Oxford. He called for people to keep getting vaccinated even as COVID-19 protocols were abandoned, citing the dangers of reinfection.

In China, meanwhile, authorities last week shut down part of Wuhan, the city where COVID-19 was first detected in late 2019, after identifying four cases. The government has suggested its "zero COVID" strategy could last for years, despite the social and economic upheaval the approach has caused.

WHO said in its report that two versions of omicron — subvariants BA.5 and BA.4 — were driving the latest wave of infections across the globe. It said BA.5 accounted for about 64% to 70% of sequences shared with the world's largest public viral database.

The highest numbers of new cases were reported in Japan, the U.S., South Korea, Germany and Italy. The most deaths were reported in the U.S., Brazil, Italy, Japan and Australia.

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HEADLINE	08/03 New government reports on long Covid
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/government-reports-long-covid-lay-existing/story?id=87824116
GIST	<p>The federal government took an initial step forward in its response to long COVID-19 Wednesday, releasing two reports that compile what federally-funded services are available to people already suffering from the condition, and what research efforts are still needed to better understand how to address it.</p> <p>"These are initial reports. They're a significant step, but they're one step," said Dr. Rachel Levine, the U.S. assistant secretary for health for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in an interview with ABC News.</p> <p>"And the work begins tomorrow, as we work on the implementation of the recommendations to the report moving forward," Levine said.</p> <p>The reports stemmed from a presidential memorandum issued by President Joe Biden in April, which created an interagency task force on long COVID headed up by HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra and Levine, who will now oversee a new office specifically focused on long COVID at the department.</p> <p>The HHS Office of Long COVID Research and Practice "will be charged with the implementation" of both plans produced by HHS and updating both regularly -- but doing so will hinge on funding for staff and operations in the next annual budget.</p>

To start, it's not yet clear how common long COVID is. Estimates of how many people experience long-term symptoms after a COVID-19 infection vary between 5% and 30% of people, while a recent large study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that age might be a factor.

One in five adults under 65 has a health condition related to a previous COVID infection, while one in four people over 65 does, the CDC study found. Women, too, might be disproportionately affected.

A lack of data on who these people are -- from race and ethnicity to gender -- also leaves gaps in how equitable the U.S. response is.

"While racial disparities in Long COVID are relatively unexplored, it is well understood that some racial and ethnic minority communities are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19," the HHS report published Wednesday said.

Only 65% of over 61 million COVID cases reported by early 2022 included race and ethnicity data, according to the report.

Addressing who has long COVID and whether everyone is equitably getting both the treatment and the government-supported services to help them, like disability benefits, is a large focus of the report.

"We want the parent who lost their job to know that there is income and job assistance available. We want health care providers to know that technical guidelines and resources can help them do their job and that research is on-going to continue to improve their ability to treat and care for their patients. Simply put we want to assist the American public in addressing the longer-terms effects of COVID-19," HHS spokesperson Tara Broido told ABC News.

There are 200 services for people with long COVID listed in the report, including technical guidelines for health care providers working with long COVID patients.

"We're going to figure out what the gaps are and where we need additional resources," Levine said.

And while there are already studies underway across the government, including at the National Institutes of Health, the CDC and the Department of Veterans Affairs, the HHS reports on long COVID call for faster research and implementation.

"The current lag in research being translated into practice is simply not acceptable in the current environment," the report finds.

"We must aggressively innovate how we do research and accelerate the pace of research to meet the challenge of the moment. ... We need to rethink how we disseminate research and translate findings into practical solutions more quickly."

Levine called the two reports, and specifically the research plan, a "living document" that should serve as "guideposts for government action."

"This is an initial step in a long term project. So I think it will help people, but then it's going to inform how we move forward to help people over the long term," Levine said.

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HEADLINE	08/03 Rio Grande dries even in Albuquerque
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/race-save-fish-río-grande-dries-albuquerque-87867525
GIST	ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. -- On a recent, scorching afternoon in Albuquerque, off-road vehicles cruised up and down a stretch of dry riverbed where normally the Rio Grande flows. The drivers weren't thrill-seekers, but biologists hoping to save as many endangered fish as they could before the sun turned shrinking pools of water into dust.

For the first time in four decades, America's fifth-longest river went dry in Albuquerque last week. Habitat for the endangered Rio Grande silvery minnow — a shimmering, pinky-sized native fish — went with it. Although summer storms have made the river wet again, experts warn the drying this far north is a sign of an increasingly fragile water supply, and that current conservation measures may not be enough to save the minnow and still provide water to nearby farms, backyards and parks.

The minnow inhabits only about 7% of its historic range and has withstood a century of habitat loss as the nearly 1,900 mile-long (3,058-kilometer) river was dammed, diverted and channeled from Colorado to New Mexico, Texas and northern Mexico. In 1994, the U.S. government listed it as endangered. Scientists, water managers and environmental groups have worked to keep the fish alive — as required by the Endangered Species Act — but the efforts haven't kept pace with demand for water and climate change.

Years of drought, scorching temperatures and an unpredictable monsoon season are zapping what's left of its habitat, leaving officials with little recourse but to hope for rain.

“They're adapted for a lot of conditions but not to figure this out,” said Thomas Archdeacon, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist in charge of a program to rescue the fish. “When you have flow one day and no flow the next for miles, they don't know how to get out of that.”

When parts of the river dry out, officials use hand nets and seines to pull fish from warm puddles and relocate them to still-flowing sections of the river. The minnow's survival rate after being rescued is slim — just over 5% — due to the stress of warm, stagnant water and being forcibly relocated.

Still, leaving the fish in the pools is a certain death sentence, said Archdeacon. He and the other biologists drove over miles of dried riverbed to where the water picked up again — at the outflow of a sewage treatment plant. Only a handful of the 400 rescued fish would survive, with their best chance swimming through treated sewage.

Over the years, the government has bred and released large numbers of silvery minnows, but for the species to recover, it always comes down to habitat, officials say.

And few options remain to get significantly more water into the river.

“Climate change is coming at us so fast right now that it's outstripping those tools that we developed over the last few decades,” said John Fleck, a water policy researcher at the University of New Mexico.

Historically, one way to send more water into the river has been to release it from upstream reservoirs. But this year, New Mexico has been unable to store extra water because of a downstream debt it owes Texas as part of a compact. Deep into the driest period the West has seen in 1,200 years, the river wasn't replenished by rainstorms that came in June.

“The timing and the placement of the storms weren't in the right place to keep the river flowing,” said Dave Dubois, New Mexico's state climatologist.

To keep more water in the Rio Grande, the state and irrigation districts are offering to pay farmers to leave fields unplanted, but so far, few have opted in. In New Mexico, small-scale farming is the norm and many farmers water their fields with centuries-old earthen canals that run through their backyards, maintaining the land for cultural reasons, too.

By fallowing their fields, farmers would help save water for the minnow and alleviate the debt to Texas. But officials say that in one key district on the river, only 5% of land was left fallow this year.

“We need more people to do it,” said Jason Casuga, chief engineer for the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. But the program is just in its second year, and farmers want to grow crops, Casuga said.

	<p>For the past four years, Ron Moya has farmed about 50 acres (20 hectares) of hay and produce near Albuquerque. A retired engineer, Moya said he answered a calling to work the same land that generations of his family had cultivated before him. Last year, Moya left 10 acres (4 hectares) of his plot unplanted in exchange for several thousand dollars, but said he wouldn't do it this year — even though he was offered more money — because he wanted the moisture to keep the soil on his farm alive. Moya is skeptical that fallowing alone will achieve much.</p> <p>“There’s people whose livelihood depends on growing their hay. That’s what they know. Can you imagine the whole valley being fallowed? That just seems silly,” he said.</p> <p>Nor is there much water to squeeze out of New Mexico's biggest city, Albuquerque. Like other Western metropolises, the city of roughly 563,000 has dramatically cut its per-capita water use, from about 250 gallons (946 liters) per day in 1994 to 119 gallons (450 liters) in 2019, according to data provided by the city's water utility. Albuquerque also uses groundwater and water from the Colorado River.</p> <p>According to Mike Hamman, New Mexico's state water engineer, “the low hanging fruit has already been picked in Albuquerque, so now it gets a little harder.”</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Peru PM resigns, adds to political turmoil
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/prime-minister-resigns-adding-political-turmoil-peru-87900024
GIST	<p>LIMA, Peru -- Peru's prime minister announced his resignation Wednesday, adding to political uncertainty in the South American nation as President Pedro Castillo faces several criminal investigations after only a year in office.</p> <p>In a letter to the president posted on his Twitter account, Aníbal Torres said he was giving up the post “for personal reasons.”</p> <p>Castillo, who under the law can accept or reject the resignation, made no comment.</p> <p>Torres was Castillo’s fourth prime minister, having taken the post in February. Previously, he had been justice minister since Castillo took office July 28, 2021.</p> <p>Castillo was a rural teacher before he shocked Peru's political elite by winning election as president campaigning on promises to improve education, health care and other services. But the political neophyte's first year has seen near constant turmoil, with Cabinet members changing multiple times and Castillo staving off two impeachment attempts.</p> <p>The president also has five investigations pending against him, including some involving claims of corruption and one for the alleged plagiarism of his master’s thesis.</p> <p>Torres, who said he wanted to return to university teaching, has been a strong defender of Castillo. He has criticized the press and said those attacking the president “belong to the upper class, the right and the ultra-right.” He said those who are accusing the president are “the real thieves, who have stolen billions” from Peru.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 ASEAN urges calm over Taiwan
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/se-asia-urges-us-china-avoid-provocation-taiwan-87907451
GIST	<p>PHNOM PENH, Cambodia -- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is calling for calm in the Taiwan Strait, urging against any “provocative action” in the wake of a visit to Taipei by U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that has infuriated Beijing.</p>

In a rare statement on such issues from the 10-nation group, some of whose members drift more toward China in allegiance and some toward the United States, ASEAN foreign ministers meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia said Thursday that they were concerned the situation could “destabilize the region and eventually could lead to miscalculation, serious confrontation, open conflicts and unpredictable consequences among major powers.”

Both U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi were taking part in the ongoing ASEAN meetings in Phnom Penh on Thursday and Friday.

Pelosi received a euphoric welcome as the first U.S. House speaker, and highest ranking U.S. official, to visit Taiwan in more than 25 years, and China swiftly responded by announcing multiple military exercises nearby.

China claims the self-governing island of Taiwan as its territory and opposes any engagement by Taiwanese officials with foreign governments.

Beijing has accused the U.S. of breaking the status quo with the Pelosi visit, while the U.S. insists there has been no change to its “one-China” position of recognizing the government in Beijing, while allowing for informal relations and defense ties with Taipei.

On the other side, with China's recent increase in military activities around Taiwan, Washington accuses Beijing of no longer accepting the status quo.

Shortly after Pelosi landed Tuesday night, China announced live-fire drills that reportedly started that night, as well as the four-day exercises starting Thursday. The People’s Liberation Army Air Force also flew a contingent of 21 warplanes toward Taiwan.

Meantime, the U.S. has an aircraft carrier group and other naval assets in the region.

In their statement, the ASEAN foreign ministers called for “maximum restraint” and for all sides to “refrain from provocative action.”

“The world is in dire need of wisdom and responsibility of all leaders to uphold multilateralism and partnership, cooperation, peaceful-coexistence and healthy competition for our shared goals of peace, stability, security and inclusive and sustainable development,” they said.

“We should act together and ASEAN stands ready to play a constructive role in facilitating peaceful dialogue between all parties including through utilizing ASEAN-led mechanisms to deescalate tension, to safeguard peace, security and development in our region.”

ASEAN is made up of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

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HEADLINE	08/03 Kentucky: heavily damaged infrastructure
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/kentucky-governor-water-systems-heavily-damaged-flooding-scorching/story?id=87870787
GIST	<p>Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said water and electricity systems across the state remain heavily damaged Wednesday from intense flooding, an issue raising concerns as scorching heat replaces rainfall.</p> <p>National, state and local authorities are working to bring food, water and electricity to those in the affected areas, he said.</p>

"These are proud, hardworking folks that have just lost it all, and I think the least we can do as human beings, as people of values, is to give and do what we can to get them back on their feet," Beshear said.

At Wednesday's press conference, Beshear also said 1,300 people have been rescued from flooded areas and 3 have been confirmed as missing, although that number is likely higher than what has been reported.

The death toll hasn't risen since Monday, with 37 people reported to have died [due to the floods](#), according to the governor.

Beshear said that a total of 219 people have been temporarily housed in Kentucky's state parks and another 221 in shelters, to account for 440 displaced individuals. However, there are many more displaced persons that are staying with friends and family that are not included in that total, he said.

Cooling centers have been established across eight counties as the region braces for severe heat on Wednesday and Thursday, according to Beshear. The governor encouraged residents, especially elderly, high risk and displaced individuals without electricity, to use the cooling centers in order to stay safe in the heat.

Restoring the damaged infrastructure will require "significant time and significant dollars," Beshear said.

Beshear added that power outages were cut almost in half on Tuesday, with a remaining 5,058 hookups without power. Water outages remain at just over 1,800 service connections and 45,600 are under boiled water advisories, he said.

The most essential relief right now, Beshear said, is to get people water.

The National Guard has distributed over 2,400 cases of water as of Wednesday morning. Crews continue to deliver supplies and conduct welfare checks, officials said.

Jeremey Lowe, a Kentucky National Guard detachment sergeant and critical care flight paramedic, said the role of his crew has changed from emergency rescues to health and welfare checks over the last couple of days.

At the height of the flooding, Lowe's crews worked to hoist people off roofs and out of trees using aircraft to take them to a safe area. The paramedics are now working to help elderly and medication dependent residents, he said.

Lowe told ABC News the majority of their welfare checks require no further assistance from the team, as "the people affected are self-sufficient and independent."

While many people have been evacuated throughout the flooding, some are now sheltering in isolated areas, relying on food and water deliveries from authorities, Kentucky National Guard crew chief Shaun Morris told ABC News.

Morris said flooding conditions seem to be improving, but that debris and damages have left many roads and bridges impassable, making his airborne crews essential to the relief effort.

Beshear said many roads and bridges have been "just eaten away."

There is a Team Kentucky Flood Relief Fund that has raised over \$3 million in donations for affected families, Beshear said.

The first funds will go toward funerals for those who were killed in the floods, Beshear said.

	"A lot of the grief that we've suppressed these last seven days trying to get the mud out and take care of each other...it's going to come to the surface," Beshear said. "Remember it's okay not to be okay. I don't think our brains or our hearts are designed to deal with trauma and loss at this level."
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HEADLINE	08/03 Sea level rise to worsen coastal flooding
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/sea-level-rise-expected-worsen-coastal-flooding-sunny/story?id=87874281
GIST	<p>The effects of sea level rise on coastal communities is even more drastic than scientists previously thought -- with more evidence pointing to increases in flooding, even on days without rain, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.</p> <p>High-tide flooding, or "sunny day flooding," is becoming increasingly common due to decades of sea level rise, NOAA said in its update to its sea level rise report released Tuesday.</p> <p>This type of flooding results from the overflow of ocean water at high tide that then covers low-lying areas -- typically occurring when the tides reach anywhere from 1.75 to 2 feet above the daily average, according to NOAA.</p> <p>The water then spills onto streets or bubbles up from storm drains and will do so "more regularly," even with a mere full moon or change in prevailing winds or currents.</p> <p>Coastal communities around the U.S. will continue to experience high-tide flooding -- also known as "king tides" or "nuisance" flooding -- with damage to basements and roadways commonplace as well as threats to human safety. Communities along the East Coast and Gulf of Mexico may see some of the highest levels of increases -- with an over 150% increase in high-tide events in 2022 compared to 2000, the report stated.</p> <p>The silver lining is that as science advances, so does meteorologists' ability to predict when high-tide flooding will occur, according to NOAA.</p> <p>In addition, due to lingering climatological effects from La Niña, coastal areas aren't predicted to experience a record number of flood events this year compared to 2021.</p> <p>"The East and Gulf coasts already experience twice as many days of high tide flooding compared to the year 2000, flooding shorelines, streets and basements and damaging critical infrastructure," said Nicole LeBoeuf, director of NOAA's National Ocean Service, in a statement. "As sea levels continue to rise, NOAA is committed to working with coastal communities to provide the tide gauge information and tools they need to tackle the problem, both now and in coming years."</p> <p>Coastal communities in three locations along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts saw record high-tide flooding from May 2021 to April 2022: Reedy Point, Delaware; Springmaid Pier, South Carolina, near Myrtle Beach; and the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands in the Pacific. That trend that is expected to continue into 2023 and beyond without improved flood defenses</p> <p>The national outlook on high-tide events for 2022 is three to seven days total for the year in the U.S., according to NOAA. By 2050, high-tide flooding is expected to be between about 45 to 70 days per year on average, according to the report, which based the long-term projections off relative sea level rise predictions by 2050.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Texas wildfires continue to erupt
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/texas-wildfires-continue-erupt-firefighters-moving-87904218
GIST	TOLAR, Texas -- One firefighter was injured and two others were treated for heat exhaustion while fighting a wildfire in North Texas that burned almost half a square mile Wednesday, officials said.

	<p>The fire near Tolar, about 40 miles (65 kilometers) southwest of Fort Worth, was completely uncontained as of Wednesday afternoon, according to the Texas A&M Forest Service.</p> <p>The injured firefighter was airlifted to a Dallas hospital with burns to 10% of his body, according to a Hood County statement. His condition was not immediately known.</p> <p>No structures have been reported damaged in that fire 16 miles (25.75 kilometers) north of the two-week-old Chalk Mountain Fire, which was 96% contained Wednesday after burning 10 1/2 square miles (27 1/3 square kilometers) and destroying 16 homes and damaging five others.</p> <p>Meanwhile, wildfires have erupted in Central Texas as hot, breezy weather and extreme drought persist in the area, officials said Wednesday.</p> <p>A fire on the Hays-Blanco county line about 30 miles (48.28 kilometers) west of Austin has destroyed three homes and an occupied trailer and blackened 1 1/4 square miles (3 1/4 square kilometers), Texas A&M Forest Service spokesman Walter Flocke said. That fire was 60% contained Wednesday, he said.</p> <p>A fire near Fredericksburg, 60 miles (96.56 kilometers) west of Austin, burned a little more than two square miles (5 2/3 square kilometers) and was 25% contained Wednesday, but it had burned no homes, according to a statement by Fredericksburg officials.</p>
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	08/04 China info operations uses false news
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/aug/4/chinese-info-operation-uses-false-news-and-social/
GIST	<p>A forged letter from Sen. Marco Rubio, false news sites criticizing House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's Taiwan trip, and fake social media accounts are all part of a complex pro-China information operation revealed by the cybersecurity firm Mandiant on Thursday.</p> <p>Mandiant said it found 72 suspected false news sites targeting audiences in North America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia with messages critical of America and boosting China.</p> <p>The new report authored by Mandiant analysts Ryan Serabian and Daniel Zafra said a Chinese public relations firm and a technology company are behind the "HaiEnergy" campaign using 11 different languages.</p> <p>"The campaign leveraged fabricated content designed to discredit opponents who have been critical of the Chinese government, including Chinese businessman Guo Wengui (Miles Kwok) and German anthropologist Adrian Zenz — known for his research on Xinjiang — and China's reported genocide against the Uyghur population," Mandiant said in its report.</p> <p>The pro-China information operation used a suspected fake Twitter persona, Jonas Drosten, to smear Mr. Zenz. The account falsely alleged in December 2021 that Mr. Rubio, Florida Republican, and former White House strategist Steven Bannon routed money to Mr. Zenz through the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation.</p> <p>China Daily, Chinese state-run media, then amplified these bogus accusations in a May 2022 article claiming that the fake Drosten was a former colleague of Mr. Zenz.</p> <p>Mr. Rubio's office said the letter was an obvious fake, and Twitter has suspended the false Drosten account.</p>

Return to Top	<p>“I am not surprised that I was targeted by China once again,” Mr. Rubio, Florida Republican, told The Washington Times in a statement. “It is important to expose these networks. Even sloppy efforts can cause confusion, and you can be certain the Chinese Communist Party will continue to slander its opponents in increasingly sophisticated ways.”</p> <p>The HaiEnergy campaign not only targeted Republicans but also slammed Mrs. Pelosi and looked to fuel outrage over the Supreme Court’s decision to eliminate the 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling that recognized abortion rights.</p> <p>Two false news sites published articles criticizing Mrs. Pelosi’s Taiwan trip on Monday and said that she should “stay away from Taiwan,” according to Mandiant.</p> <p>Mandiant said it also spotted an English-language article written by someone claiming to be an American woman living outside the U.S. who said U.S. law enforcement violently responded to protesters demonstrating against the Supreme Court’s decision undoing abortion rights.</p> <p>Mandiant did not directly attribute the cyber influence campaign to the Chinese government and observed that the information operation appeared to represent the continued outsourcing of such activity to third parties.</p> <p>The Chinese public relations firm Haixun, which Mandiant said is behind the campaign, offers its services in at least 40 different languages across more than 100 countries including packages targeting English speakers and producing custom content and videos.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/04 Ukraine: Russia jumped gun in cyberspace
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/08/04/did-russia-mess-up-its-cyberwar-with-ukraine-before-it-even-invaded/
GIST	<p>Jan. 14 was a rough day for the Ukrainian government: Destructive malware wiped out computers at two agencies, and hackers temporarily took down dozens of agency websites and left a message on the Foreign Ministry site to “Be afraid and expect the worst.”</p> <p>Now, though, Ukrainian officials say that the assault was a huge miscalculation on the Russians’ part. They actually undermined potential future digital sabotage campaigns by exposing the covert access they had gained, and the incident made it easier for Ukraine to recover from attacks once an invasion began in earnest one month later, the officials say.</p> <p>“They could have waited for the beginning of the war and if it had happened it would have been a disaster,” said Victor Zhora, deputy head of Ukraine’s main cybersecurity agency, the State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection.</p> <p>Zhora spoke to my colleague Ellen Nakashima and myself in a pair of recent interviews. Ilya Vityuk, who heads the state security service’s cybersecurity department, also spoke to Ellen.</p> <p>Their accounts could shed some light on the mystery of why Russia hasn’t overwhelmed Ukraine in cyberspace, although independent experts differ on the plausibility of the Ukrainian claims. And the Ukrainian officials didn’t attribute the minimal Russian cyber operations to the mistakes of Jan. 14 alone, citing outside defensive help, among other factors.</p> <p>Zhora said Russian hackers had access on Jan. 14 to Kitsoft, an IT vendor that has developed websites for the Ukrainian government. (Kitsoft has said not all the hacked sites ran its software.) “It’s really fantastic access they got and they burned it,” he said.</p> <p>Russia-based, government-affiliated hacking groups shared their digital access with military intelligence, Vityuk said — an unusual situation. “They combined everything,” he said.</p>

“They burned all their accesses,” he said. “After that, they started to achieve new ones and burned those as well.”

“The hacks gave us some lessons in terms of how to respond, how to coordinate,” Zhora said. “So it was a good exercise for us.”

Russia’s thinking

Both officials could only speculate why Russia did what it did on Jan. 14. Zhora said it amounted to a “psyops” mission targeting the Ukrainian public in an attempt to sway Ukrainians into thinking that Russia was too strong.

“So the idea was to indicate that, ‘We have great power. We can do anything in cyber, battlefield, whatever,’ ” Zhora said. Russia underestimated the kind of fight Ukraine would put up, instead expecting an easy invasion, so there was no need to hold anything in reserve, Zhora and Vityuk said. U.S. intelligence officials have likewise concluded that [Russia anticipated less resistance](#).

Those Jan. 14 missteps have had a lasting impact on Russia’s cyber operations, the pair said. When Ukraine’s “IT Army” (a group of hackers the Ukraine government says it has no connection to) [took down Russian YouTube clone RuTube](#) for three days in May, Russia didn’t retaliate.

“If they had accesses, something in their pockets, aces in their sleeves, once RuTube was embarrassing for them, they should have a response, like, ‘Don’t do that again,’ ” Vityuk said. “But there were no responses from them, there were no significant cyberattacks after this ... So probably if they could do something they would. So they have nothing ready for now. That’s how I see it.”

That doesn’t mean Ukraine should rest easy in cyberspace, Vityuk said.

“We don’t know how the situation may change in a year, two years, five years,” he said. “So we have to be aware and prepared. Saying, ‘Oh Russia, they cannot do anything’ — that wouldn’t be wise. We can’t let our guard down.”

Ukraine remains focused on protecting government operations, energy companies, financial services firms and telecom providers, Zhora said. He also said Russian hackers have still shown signs of innovation, such as with the modified Industroyer 2 malware, an update of the malware Russia used to take down the Ukrainian power grid in 2016.

Foreign allies and private sector companies also have helped fortify Ukraine against Russian cyberattacks, Zhora said.

Cyber experts differ on how much of a role Russia’s Jan. 14 burnt accesses have played since.

- “In that characterization, it sounds a bit over-exaggerated. I would not characterize that statement as a broad generalization,” said **Eric Chien**, a security researcher for the Symantec Threat Hunter Team, citing a steady stream of successful attacks during the invasion.
- “That’s consistent with a lot of different possible theories,” said **Jon Bateman**, a senior fellow in the Technology and International Affairs Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a former Pentagon cybersecurity official. Citing reports on [Russia’s lack of “reserve” cyber capabilities](#), Bateman said, “I think that [burned access] is one good explanation for what’s happening.”
- “It doesn’t strike me as plausible,” said **Dmitri Alperovitch**, chairman of the Silverado Policy Accelerator. “Access is easy to reacquire.”
- “It’s possible,” said **John Hultquist**, Mandiant’s vice president of intelligence analysis. “When you’re carrying out these sort of overt incidents you trade covert access.”
- Said one U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the matter’s sensitivity: **“The burning of the access was immaterial because if access is easy to achieve and regain, then burning it brings a minimal cost.”**

HEADLINE	08/03 Fake sites target investors in Europe
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/cybercrime/thousands-of-sophisticated-fake-sites-targeting-investors-in-europe
GIST	<p>Go big, or go home. That is clearly the thinking of bad actors who have created thousands of fraudulent investment sites throughout Europe — and whose actions could bode a view of things to come in the U.S.</p> <p>Researchers recently discovered a network of more than 11,000 fake investment sites, aimed at luring in fraud victims throughout Europe. Perhaps not surprisingly, these sites often appeared more sophisticated and realistic than many previous fake sites, including “fabricated evidence of enrichment and falsified celebrity endorsements to create an image of legitimacy and lure in a larger number of victims,” according to Bleeping Computer’s report.</p> <p>These fraudulent financial sites have targeted investment customers in the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, Norway, Sweden and the Czech Republic. However, U.S. customers may be next, according to experts.</p> <p>Through these sites, European investment customers have been tricked into sinking their money in purportedly “high-return investments,” for which they were often required to deposit a minimum of \$255 (or €250). Despite efforts to contain or demolish these false financial pretenders, more than 5,000 of these fake investment sites were still active as of late July, according to Group-IB. The research firm uncovered and mapped a huge thriving network of related phishing sites and content hosts.</p> <p>Investment fraudsters have also effectively promoted their fake sites through social media platforms, like Facebook and YouTube, where they can reel in more potential victims and build their credibility. Another trick: These sites cross delivery channels, often using mobile texts and voice calls from supposed “customer agents” to make these financial offerings seem more legitimate.</p> <p>Going another step further, after depositing their initial investment, these fake investment sites send along a “dashboard” that purportedly allows users to track their accounts, thereby “prolong[ing the] illusion of a legitimate investment and entice victims to deposit more money for larger profits,” Group-IB said. When investing victims try to pull out their money from these fake accounts, the fraud is ultimately revealed.</p> <p>Can U.S. investment firms prevent this kind of impersonation and trickery?</p> <p>Jim Ducharme, executive at Outseer, the Massachusetts-based payment verification company that spun out of RSA Security last summer, pointed out that, “Banks are required by law to keep detailed records of work-related employee interactions to ensure that there is no fraudulent activity taking place.</p> <p>“Record keeping has always played a significant role in holding Wall Street accountable,” Ducharme added. “By relying on external communication methods to discuss confidential trades and deals, bankers and traders compromise overall market security and investor protection.”</p> <p>“This investigation marks a strong start in the crackdown on clandestine messaging on Wall Street,” he added. “I believe this could be the tip of the iceberg when it comes to uncovering fraudulent activity.”</p> <p>In a recent email to its customer, financial services company Charles Schwab warned: “Stay alert for investment scams involving cryptocurrency. At Schwab, we’re committed to helping you protect your assets. One way we do that is by raising awareness of the increase in fraudulent investment schemes (“scams”) involving cryptocurrencies and digital assets.</p> <p>“While investing involves taking some risks, being scammed shouldn’t be one of them,” the email added.</p> <p>5 red flags for investment scams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Guaranteed” high investment returns, supposedly with little or no risk, and sounding too good to be true.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlicensed or unregistered sellers. Use Investor.gov to check out the background of anyone offering you an investment in securities. • Skyrocketing account values. Investments that appear to rapidly increase in value are often fake. • Fake testimonials. Scammers often pay people to provide fake reviews, so never rely solely on testimonials in making an investment decision. • Fake contacts. Take caution if someone approaches you through social media with an investment opportunity. Pretending to be a friend or to have a mutual acquaintance is a common tactic used to gain trust.
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HEADLINE	08/04 Ukraine shuts major Russian bot farm
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/ukraine-shutters-major-russian-bot/
GIST	<p>Ukrainian law enforcers claim to have dismantled a large bot farm used by Russian special services to spread disinformation and propaganda in the country.</p> <p>The Secret Service of Ukraine (SSU) said the million-strong bot farm was used to “spin destabilizing content” on the country’s military and political leadership to an audience of over 400,000.</p> <p>This included fake news on the situation at the front, an alleged conflict between the President’s Office and the commander-in-chief of Ukraine’s armed forces, and a campaign to discredit the first lady.</p> <p>A Russian citizen and ‘political expert’ based in Kyiv was unmasked as the leader of the operation. With his help, the group automated the management of a large number of bot accounts on social media, using equipment based in Kyiv, Kharkiv and Vinnytsia, the SSU said.</p> <p>This kit included 5000 SIM cards used to register new accounts, and 200 proxy servers designed to spoof IP addresses and circumvent internet blocks.</p> <p>“Today, the information front is no less important than military operations. And Russia understands this very well – that’s why they throw such massive resources to divide Ukrainian society. Bot farms, pseudo-experts, information and psychological operations, enforcing pro-Russian messages – all this is in the enemy’s arsenal,” argued acting SSU head, Vasyl Malyuk.</p> <p>“The adversary tries to use any opportunity to fuel internal strife or manipulate public opinion. Unfortunately, consciously or unconsciously, some Ukrainian political forces play along with the enemy and put their own ambitions above state interests. However, we are countering these destructive activities.”</p> <p>Ukraine claims to have “neutralized” 1200 cyber-incidents and cyber-attacks on government and strategic critical infrastructure since the start of the war.</p> <p>However, Russian propaganda efforts continue, not just inside Ukraine but also in a bid to sway public opinion among its allies.</p> <p>Last month, Recorded Future claimed that Moscow is running multiple info ops campaigns designed to sow division in the West.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Woody Rat malware targets Russia entities
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/russian-organizations-attacked-with-new-woody-rat-malware/
GIST	Unknown attackers target Russian entities with newly discovered malware that allows them to control and steal information from compromised devices remotely.

According to Malwarebytes, one of the Russian organizations that were attacked using this malware is a government-controlled defense corporation.

"Based on a fake domain registered by the threat actors, we know that they tried to target a Russian aerospace and defense entity known as [OAK](#)," the Malwarebytes Labs researchers said.

Dubbed Woody Rat, this remote access trojan (RAT) has a wide range of capabilities and has been used in attacks for at least one year.

This malware is currently delivered onto targets' computers via phishing emails through two distribution methods: ZIP archive files containing the malicious payload or "Information security memo" Microsoft Office documents that exploit the Follina vulnerability to drop the payloads.

"The earliest versions of this Rat was typically archived into a zip file pretending to be a document specific to a Russian group," the researchers added.

"When the Follina vulnerability became known to the world, the threat actor switched to it to distribute the payload, as [identified](#) by MalwareHunterTeam."

Its list of features includes collecting system information, listing folders and running processes, executing commands and files received from its command-and-control (C2) server, downloading, uploading, and deleting files on infected machines, and taking screenshots.

Woody Rat can also execute .NET code and PowerShell commands and scripts received from its C2 server using two DLLs named WoodySharpExecutor and WoodyPowerSession.

Once launched on a compromised device, the malware uses [process hollowing](#) to inject itself into a suspended Notepad process, deletes itself from the disk to evade detection from security products, and resumes the thread.

The RAT encrypts its C2 communication channels using a combination of RSA-4096 and AES-CBC to elude network-based monitoring.

Malwarebytes is yet to attribute the malware and the attacks to a known threat group but said that a very short list of possible suspects includes Chinese and North Korean APTs.

"This very capable Rat falls into the category of unknown threat actors we track. Historically, Chinese APTs such as Tonto team as well as North Korea with Konni have targeted Russia," the researchers concluded.

"However, based on what we were able to collect, there weren't any solid indicators to attribute this campaign to a specific threat actor."

This aligns with recent findings from several other vendors who also spotted Chinese hacking groups targeting [Russian officials](#), [government agencies](#) and [entities](#), and [aerospace firms](#).

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HEADLINE	08/03 Crypto platforms multimillion dollar attacks
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/several-crypto-platforms-targeted-in-multimillion-dollar-attacks/
GIST	<p>A handful of crypto platforms have been hacked over the last 24 hours, resulting in millions of dollars in stolen funds, a day after a brazen attack on the platform Nomad nearly emptied its coffers.</p> <p>The incident that drew the most concern was a wide-ranging attack on thousands of digital wallets. Blockchain security firm PeckShield told The Record that more than 7,000 cryptocurrency wallets had been attacked, leading to a total theft of about \$8 million, mostly in Solana's SOL coin.</p>

The money was sent to [four distinct wallets](#) tracked by multiple security firms. Solana later confirmed that about 8,000 wallets were drained.

This does not appear to be a bug with Solana core code, but in software used by several software wallets popular among users of the network.

Updates will be posted to <https://t.co/ivyolbdCDP> as they become available. 2/2
— Solana Status (@SolanaStatus) [August 3, 2022](#)

There were initial rumors that the total monetary value of the stolen coins reached \$580 million, but that [was quickly debunked](#), with security companies focusing on the major coins taken and not those with artificially inflated prices. The coins stolen included SOL, Ethereum, Bitcoin, and two cryptocurrencies pegged to the U.S. dollar: USDT and USDC.

“So far, the loss is estimated to be \$8 million, excluding one illiquid shitcoin (only has 30 holds & maybe misvalued [at] \$570M),” PeckShield said, using a pejorative term for a cryptocurrency overvalued by its creators.

Solana [denied](#) that the attack originated from a vulnerability in its core code but “in software used by several software wallets popular among users of the network.”

The attack targeted wallets on a variety of platforms, including Slope, Trust Wallet and Phantom, which [released](#) a message on Twitter saying the team “does not believe this is a Phantom-specific issue.”

Solana’s co-founder Anatoly Yakovenko theorized that it was a supply chain attack, which reaches a target by first attacking a third-party, on iOS and Android users.

Android seems to be affected as well. All the confirmed stories so far have had the key imported or generated on mobile. Most of the reports are slope, but a few phantom users as well.

— SMS T@ly, us (@aeyakovenko) [August 3, 2022](#)

The attack reignited the debate over “cold” and “hot” wallets within the cryptocurrency community.

Hot wallets are connected to the internet and allow users to easily trade and send cryptocurrency while cold wallets involve USB drives that are used to hold cryptocurrency and must be plugged in to be accessed. While cold wallets are considered safer, there have been [several stories over the years](#) of people losing access to millions worth of crypto simply because they lost their drive or [forgot the password](#).

[Several victims](#) of the hack [took to Twitter to lament the significant loss of funds](#), with many saying they lost thousands invested in SOL.

Nomad urges return of stolen funds

The attack on Solana wallets comes shortly after the crypto platform Nomad [was robbed of more than \\$156 million](#) in cryptocurrency after dozens of hackers targeted a vulnerability in a recent update.

In a statement to The Record, Nomad said it is working with law enforcement and blockchain analysis firm TRM Labs to trace the stolen funds, identify recipient wallets, and coordinate the return of funds.

The company said it was also partnering with nationally regulated custodian bank Anchorage Digital to facilitate the return of stolen funds. They provided a specific Anchorage wallet address where white hat hackers can return the stolen funds.

They also reiterated a warning that fraudsters and imposters may purport to be associated with Nomad in an effort to steal funds being returned to the platform.

PeckShield said blockchain data shows that about \$9 million of the estimated \$156 million has been returned to Nomad.

[#PeckShieldAlert](#) PeckShield has detected ~\$9m has returned into [@nomadxyz](#). Funds Recovery Address, including 100 [\\$ETH](#) (~\$164k) from address with ENS name bitliq.eth, ~3.78m [\\$USDC](#), ~2m [\\$USDT](#), ~15.8m [\\$CQT](#) (~\$1.38m), ~1.2m [\\$FRAX](#) (~\$1.2m), 200 [\\$WETH](#) (~328k), ~150k [\\$DAI](#) and etc. [pic.twitter.com/Bpyjt7jneK](#)
— PeckShieldAlert (@PeckShieldAlert) [August 3, 2022](#)

Other platforms allegedly hacked

Blockchain security firms have found that two other crypto platforms – Reaper Farms and ZBExchange – have also dealt with multimillion-dollar hacks over the past two days.

About \$1.8 million in cryptocurrency [was stolen from Reaper Farms](#), according to PeckShield and blockchain security firm SlowMist.

Reaper [said](#) a vulnerability in their platform was exploited, but they were able to recover about 10% of the stolen funds and are in the process of creating a compensation plan for any affected users.

“It was a very simple mistake with dire consequences – validation of the receiver account was not accurate, allowing anyone to withdraw anyone else’s funds,” the company [explained](#) in a post-mortem statement.

“I’d like to apologize profusely to users affected by this exploit, and we will work on a recovery plan to ensure you are all made whole.”

Meanwhile, on Tuesday cryptocurrency platform ZBExchange was forced to suspend deposits and withdrawals “due to the sudden failure of some core applications,” following an alleged attack from hackers.

ZB users,

Due to the sudden failure of some core applications, we’re currently responding to these issues.

To keep your assets secured, we have temporarily suspended Deposit and Withdrawal services while we resolve the issue.

We will provide an update once completed.

Thank you

— ZBExchange (@ZBexchange) [August 2, 2022](#)

The company did not respond to requests for comment but [wrote](#) in an update that it would take time to troubleshoot the issue. They urged users not to deposit any cryptocurrency before the platform recovers fully.

PeckShield pegged the platform’s losses at nearly \$5 million.

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HEADLINE	08/03 Hacktivist group posts mining firms emails
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/environmentalist-hacktivist-collective-mining-company/
GIST	<p>A hacktivist collective posted more than 2 terabytes of hacked emails and files from a host of mining companies in Central and South America Wednesday, in move to apparently expose environmental damage in the region.</p> <p>The group — which calls itself Guacamaya, named for a type of bird — posted the files from five public and private mining companies and two public agencies responsible for environmental oversight, one in Colombia and the other in Guatemala. The material was posted to a website called Enlace</p>

Hacktivista, a site for documenting hacker history, sharing educational resources, and that provides space “for hackers to publish their hacks, leaks, and communiques.”

In a Spanish-language [statement posted with the materials](#), the group decried what it described as environmental devastation at the hands of U.S. and other international governments and firms that plunder the region’s resources.

“All we really want, as our own mother warns us, is for this to stop,” the statement read, according to a Google translation. “We want them to stop, to stop once and for all exploiting, mining, polluting, that desire for dominance.”

The materials come from ENAMI, an Ecuadorian state mining company; the Agencia Nacional de Hidrocarburos (ANH) in Colombia; New Granada Energy Corporation in Colombia; Quiborax, a mining company in Chile; Oryx, an oil company in Venezuela; Tejucana, a Brazilian mining company; and Guatemala’s Ministerio De Ambiente y Recursos Naturales.

DDoSecrets, a transparency advocacy website that also hosts hacked materials in the public interest, [published a release on the files](#) simultaneously Wednesday.

Guacamaya, in March, released 4.2 terabytes of hacked material from mining subsidiaries of a Swiss investment group that detailed the companies’ apparent pollution in Guatemala. The files became part of [a massive reporting project](#) involving 65 journalists around the world that exposed not only proof of pollution, but efforts to manipulate local governments and surveillance of journalists.

After that hack, the group posted a video detailing how they accessed the systems and stole the files and emails. They also [gave an interview](#) talking about why they’re going after these companies to Forbidden Stories, the organization that coordinated and published a series of stories based on the documents.

“The role of a hacker is to take part in the different forms of resistance in any territory where there is dignified rage and a joyful desire for radical revolution,” they said.

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HEADLINE	08/03 Most impersonated software malware attacks
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/08/virustotal-reveals-most-impersonated.html
GIST	<p>Threat actors are increasingly mimicking legitimate applications like Skype, Adobe Reader, and VLC Player as a means to abuse trust relationships and increase the likelihood of a successful social engineering attack.</p> <p>Other most impersonated legitimate apps by icon include 7-Zip, TeamViewer, CCleaner, Microsoft Edge, Steam, Zoom, and WhatsApp, an analysis from VirusTotal has revealed.</p> <p>"One of the simplest social engineering tricks we've seen involves making a malware sample seem a legitimate program," VirusTotal said in a Tuesday report. "The icon of these programs is a critical feature used to convince victims that these programs are legitimate."</p> <p>It's no surprise that threat actors resort to a variety of approaches to compromise endpoints by tricking unwitting users into downloading and running seemingly innocuous executables.</p> <p>This, in turn, is primarily achieved by taking advantage of genuine domains in a bid to get around IP-based firewall defenses. Some of the top abused domains are discordapp[.]com, squarespace[.]com, amazonaws[.]com, mediafire[.]com, and qq[.]com.</p> <p>In total, no fewer than 2.5 million suspicious files downloaded from 101 domains belonging to Alexa's top 1,000 websites have been detected.</p>

The misuse of Discord has been well-documented, what with the platform's content delivery network (CDN) becoming a [fertile ground for hosting malware](#) alongside Telegram, while also offering a "perfect communications hub for attackers."

Another oft-used technique is the practice of signing malware with valid certificates stolen from other software makers. The malware scanning service said it found more than one million malicious samples since January 2021, out of which 87% had a legitimate signature when they were first uploaded to its database.

VirusTotal said it also uncovered 1,816 samples since January 2020 that masqueraded as legitimate software by packaging the malware in installers for other popular software such as Google Chrome, Malwarebytes, Zoom, Brave, Mozilla Firefox, and Proton VPN.

Such a distribution method can also result in a supply chain when attackers manage to break into a legitimate software's update server or gain unauthorized access to the source code, making it possible to sneak the malware in the form of trojanized binaries.

Alternatively, legitimate installers are being packed in compressed files along with malware-laced files, in one case including the legitimate Proton VPN installer and malware that installs the Jigsaw ransomware.

That's not all. A third method, albeit more sophisticated, entails incorporating the legitimate installer as a [portable executable resource](#) into the malicious sample so that the installer is also executed when the malware is run so as to give an illusion that the software is working as intended.

"When thinking about these techniques as a whole, one could conclude that there are both opportunistic factors for the attackers to abuse (like stolen certificates) in the short and mid term, and routinely (most likely) automated procedures where attackers aim to visually replicate applications in different ways," the researchers said.

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HEADLINE	08/03 T-Mobile retailer guilty: \$25M fraud scheme
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/tmobile-retailer-guilty-of-25m/
GIST	<p>The former owner of a T-Mobile store has been found guilty of a multimillion-dollar scheme to illegally unlock and unblock mobile devices.</p> <p>Argishti Khudaverdyan, 44, of Burbank, was found guilty of 14 federal charges including wire fraud, accessing a computer to defraud and obtain value, intentionally accessing a computer without authorization to obtain information, money laundering, and aggravated identity theft.</p> <p>From August 2014 to June 2019, Khudaverdyan fraudulently unlocked and unblocked devices on the T-Mobile, Sprint and AT&T networks. This enabled the phones to be sold on the black market and for users to stop using T-Mobile services, according to the Department of Justice (DoJ).</p> <p>From January to June 2017, Khudaverdyan also ran Top Tier Solutions, a T-Mobile store based in Eagle Rock. After his contract was terminated due to suspicious behavior, he continued with the fraud scheme.</p> <p>It was enabled by phishing for T-Mobile employee log-ins or socially engineering the firm's IT help desk to gain access to T-Mobile's internal computer systems.</p> <p>On other occasions, he's said to have worked with individuals in overseas call centers to obtain employee credentials which he then used to access systems and harvest information on higher-level staff. This info could be used with the help desk to reset passwords and provide privileged access, the DoJ said.</p> <p>Khudaverdya and his co-conspirators compromised the accounts of 50 different T-Mobile USA employees in this way, and unlocked and unblocked hundreds of thousands of phones, making \$25m in the process.</p>

	<p>The unlocking services were advertised as ‘legitimate’ T-Mobile unlocks via brokers, email advertising and websites such as “unlocks247.com.”</p> <p>Mobile devices are “locked” to a particular network until a contract is fulfilled, while others are blocked if they have been lost or stolen.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Solana wallets drained by unknown exploit
SOURCE	https://techcrunch.com/2022/08/03/solana-wallet-hack/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Solana, an increasingly popular blockchain known for its speedy transactions, has become the target of the crypto sphere’s latest hack after users reported that funds have been drained from internet-connected “hot” wallets.</p> <p>An unknown actor drained funds from approximately 8,000 wallets on the Solana network, Solana’s Status Twitter account said. It’s estimated the loss so far is around \$8 million.</p> <p>The attack – which has only affected only “hot” wallets or wallets that are always connected to the internet, allowing people to store and send tokens easily – does not appear to be limited to Solana. Justin Barlow, an investor at Solana Ventures, reported that his USDC balance was drained as well. Crypto analyst @0xfoobar confirmed that “the attacker is stealing both native tokens (SOL) and SPL tokens (USDC)... affecting wallets that have been inactive for less than 6 months.”</p> <p>The attack has compromised other wallets including Phantom, Slope, and TrustWallet.</p> <p>Initial reports suggested Solflare users were also impacted, but the company tells TechCrunch it has not been affected by this exploit. Wallets drained should be treated as compromised and abandoned, Solana warned as it encouraged users to switch to hardware or “cold” wallets.</p> <p>Phantom, a fast-growing Solana-based wallet that hit \$1.2 billion in valuation in January, said it’s “working closely with other teams to get to the bottom of a reported vulnerability in the Solana ecosystem.”</p> <p>“At this time, the team does not believe this is a Phantom-specific issue,” the wallet developer says. Slope added that it is “actively working to sort out the issue as rapidly as possible and rectify best we can”, while non-fungible token (NFT) marketplace Magic Eden called on users to revoke permissions for any suspicious links in their Phantom wallets.</p> <p>The cause of the attack remains unclear, but industry leaders including Emin Gün Sirer, founder of another popular blockchain Avalanche, pointed out that the transactions were properly signed, which means the vulnerability could be a “supply chain attack” that manages to steal users’ private keys. @0xfoobar added that “it’s likely something has caused widespread private key compromise”, and warned that revoking wallet approvals will probably not help.</p> <p>Solana spokesperson Chris Kraeuter declined to answer our questions but referred us to Solana’s Status Twitter account, which states that the issue does not appear to be a bug in Solana’s software “but in software used by several software wallets popular among users of the network.” The company added that its engineers “are currently working with multiple security researchers and ecosystem teams to identify the root cause of the exploit, which is unknown at this time.”</p> <p>The Solana attack comes just hours after malicious actors abused a “chaotic” security exploit to steal almost \$200 million in digital assets from cross-chain messaging protocol Nomad. The “free-for-all” attack, which saw more than 41 addresses drain \$152 million — 80% of the stolen funds – was made possible by a recent update to one of Nomad’s smart contracts that made it easy for users to spoof transactions.</p>
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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	08/03 Australian cuts off tracker, buys plane ticket
SOURCE	https://www.theage.com.au/national/queensland/accused-terrorist-cuts-off-tracking-device-buys-one-way-overseas-ticket-20220804-p5b79h.html
GIST	<p>An Australian man charged with terrorism offences allegedly cut off the tracking device he had been ordered to wear and booked a one-way ticket to Saudi Arabia to fly out that night.</p> <p>Omar Saghir, 40, was arrested in July 2021 by Australian Federal Police officers when he landed at Sydney Airport from Saudi Arabia, where he had been since 2019.</p> <p>The AFP alleges Saghir played a senior role in a Brisbane group that held a “religiously motivated violent extremist ideology” and a desire to travel to Syria to fight.</p> <p>Saghir has also been accused of co-founding an organisation that provided funds to people who later fled Australia to join Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a group fighting against Syrian government forces.</p> <p>Additional charges laid against Saghir also accused him of advocating terrorism on social media, in a series of videos of himself posted to Facebook between March 2019 and February 2020.</p> <p>In those videos, Saghir allegedly incited others to provide support to the proscribed terrorist organisation Islamic State, and called for followers to retaliate against those who were fighting Islamic State.</p> <p>Saghir was granted bail in February by the Brisbane Supreme Court, but was re-arrested on June 30 by counter-terrorism officers.</p> <p>It is alleged he cut off his electronic monitoring device that day and had booked a flight from Brisbane to Muscat, Oman, for that night.</p> <p>Queensland counter-terrorism officers were alerted to Saghir’s monitoring bracelet being tampered with, and they went to his home in Alexandra Hills. He was found and arrested nearby.</p> <p>On Thursday, Saghir’s case was heard briefly in Brisbane Supreme Court. Commonwealth prosecutors have applied to the court to revoke Saghir’s bail given to him for his charges in February.</p> <p>Lawyer Abdul Rashidi, representing Saghir, said Saghir would not have been able to go through Brisbane Airport’s immigration gate because he did not have a passport.</p> <p>“The core issue is whether he did intend to follow through and fly out, or whether that was his way of protesting [his treatment by police],” he said.</p> <p>Saghir remains in maximum security prison in Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre in Brisbane’s south-west.</p> <p>Judge Peter Callaghan was particularly concerned by Saghir allegedly cutting off his tracking device.</p> <p>“A wilful damage conviction in those circumstances is an attack on the system, it’s not the value of the property [damaged], it’s what it means as a challenge to the administration of justice,” he said.</p> <p>The application to revoke Saghir’s previous bail was adjourned because his lawyer had not been able to discuss the matter with him in person, and Rashidi has requested Saghir undergo a mental health assessment.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Killing al-Zawahiri make Americans safer?
SOURCE	https://www.npr.org/2022/08/03/1115389197/al-qaida-drone-strike-us-safety-al-zawahiri
GIST	<p>The State Department warns that there is a "higher potential for anti-American violence" following the U.S. killing of al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in Kabul over the weekend.</p> <p>In a "Worldwide Caution" advisory issued Tuesday, the department noted that al-Zawahiri — an architect of terrorist attacks including 9/11 and the 2000 USS Cole bombing — had urged his followers to attack the U.S., and that supporters of al-Qaida or affiliate organizations may seek to do so in the wake of his death.</p> <p>"Current information suggests that terrorist organizations continue to plan terrorist attacks against U.S. interests in multiple regions across the globe," it added. "These attacks may employ a wide variety of tactics including suicide operations, assassinations, kidnappings, hijackings, and bombings."</p> <p>Al-Qaida has not carried out a major attack against a Western target since the 2015 shooting in Paris at the office of the French satirical magazine <i>Charlie Hebdo</i>.</p> <p>The State Department is urging U.S. citizens to take certain steps to "maintain a high level of vigilance and practice good situational awareness when traveling abroad." Americans abroad are encouraged to monitor local news, maintain contact with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, consult country-specific travel advisories and enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program to receive security and emergency messages.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Biden administration officials are lauding al-Zawahiri's death as a "hugely significant blow" to al-Qaida and a development that should make Americans feel safer.</p> <p>"The American people are safer today," John Kirby, the National Security Council's coordinator for strategic communications, told NPR's Morning Edition on Tuesday. "We are obviously glad that this mission was successful, but nobody's taking a knee. Nobody's taking a breather. Nobody's patting anybody on the back. We know we have to stay vigilant against this group."</p> <p>It's an immediate-term disruption to a long-term threat</p> <p>Retired senior CIA officer Douglas London made a similar assessment on Wednesday, telling Morning Edition that removing al-Zawahiri "at least provides some immediate and short-term disruption" to the organization. Even so, he added, al-Qaida remains a threat that the U.S. must continue to work to suppress.</p> <p>He cited reporting from the United Nations and member states, including the U.S., suggesting that al-Qaida is "actually a longer-term threat, perhaps more so than ISIS."</p> <p>"Al-Qaida has more of a long-term aspiration to strike the United States, in the homeland and externally if possible," London says. "It's at the core of its strategy to get the head of the snake."</p> <p>What recent history can tell us about retaliation and safety</p> <p>How likely is potential retaliation? Previous data is scarce, but suggests odds could be low.</p> <p>Daniel Hepworth, a professor at Kentucky's Murray State University, used data from a global terrorism database to analyze the attacks of al-Qaida and affiliated groups before and up to two months after the targeted killings of four top leaders (including Osama bin Laden and Anwar al-Awlaki) to see if there was any evidence of retaliation.</p> <p>There was not, according to findings he published in the <i>Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism</i> in 2014.</p> <p>"There were no significant changes in the type or target of attacks, no change in the frequency of attacks, and, in one regression model, evidence that the average number of fatalities per attack actually decreased following the targeted killings," he wrote.</p>

Other case studies about the impact that targeted killings have on the behavior — and threat level — of terrorist groups have more mixed results.

Five years after a U.S. raid killed bin Laden, a terrorism expert and senior adviser to the RAND Corporation named Brian Michael Jenkins [wrote a commentary](#) about whether the world was any safer.

The answer is complicated, but one piece of evidence was clear:

"The jihadists vowed revenge for bin Laden's death, but there have been no centrally directed attacks in the United States since 2011," Jenkins wrote. "In fact, the jihadists weren't gaining many adherents anyway."

He said some studies show that so-called "decapitation" decreases the number of attacks and their success rates. Others suggest that while the frequency of attacks may decrease, their severity does not.

Other case studies indicate that the "elimination of terrorist leaders affected neither the rate of terrorist attacks nor the likelihood of organizational collapse," he wrote. Still, he pointed out that other ripple effects of these attacks include sending leaders deeper underground, hampering their ability to communicate and function and hurting morale.

He concluded that such killings have a negative impact on terrorist organizations, but not a decisive effect. "Was [al-Qaida] hurt by the demise of its charismatic leader? Certainly," Jenkins wrote. "Is the world a safer place because of it? Probably not."

A diplomat behind the Doha agreement says the Taliban clearly violated it

It's also notable that al-Zawahiri was sheltering in Kabul, not only in a country under Taliban control but specifically in an upscale neighborhood where many Taliban leaders live.

London says the fact that he was living there reveals more about what the Taliban is thinking than about al-Qaida. He notes that al-Zawahiri had long preached isolation and encouraged leaders to hide in underground bunkers, and speculates that Taliban pressure forced him to Kabul where they could "keep an eye on him, to have some leverage over the group."

"Al-Qaida and Taliban cooperation remains very good, but I think the Taliban would rather find some way to keep them from operating such that, should they conduct an attack, it won't be immediately traced to their support of al-Qaida in-country," he explains.

The peace deal that the U.S. and Taliban signed in 2020, known as [the Doha Agreement](#), stipulates that the Taliban end support for U.S.-deemed terrorist organizations. Those include al-Qaida, with which it has deep historical ties (for instance, the Taliban sheltered bin Laden in Afghanistan after 9/11).

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken [has accused the Taliban](#) of "grossly" violating the agreement — and repeated assurances to the world that they would not harbor extremists — by "hosting and sheltering" al-Zawahiri.

The Taliban, in turn, says that the U.S. violated the agreement by carrying out a precision drone strike in Afghanistan.

"Such actions are a repetition of the failed experiences of the past 20 years and are against the interests of the US, Afghanistan and the region," Taliban chief spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid [said in a statement](#).

Zalmay Khalilzad, the former U.S. special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation who helped negotiate the agreement, [told NPR's All Things Considered](#) that Blinken is correct, and the Taliban's claim is "obviously wrong."

"The agreement is clear. That's in black and white," he said. "Allowing ... someone who plotted and planned the 9/11 attack [and] carried out other attacks on the United States to stay in Kabul, and issue a

statement threatening the security of the United States is ... beyond any doubt a violation of the Doha agreement."

What does that violation mean for the viability of the agreement and U.S.-Taliban relationship going forward? Blinken, for one, has said the U.S. will continue to support the Afghan people with humanitarian assistance and human rights advocacy.

Khalilzad said the U.S. holds the Taliban accountable to the agreement that they made. At the same time, the U.S. wants to maintain the capability to respond to the presence of al-Qaida or any other terrorists that pose a threat. And that response looks different than it did 20 years ago, he added.

"Our ... bipartisan commitment has been that we would not allow Afghanistan to become a safe haven for terrorists who would threaten the United States," he said. "And we demonstrated a few days ago that even though we don't have a large number of troops, or any troops in Afghanistan, we have the capability and the will to execute and deliver on the commitment that we have made."

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HEADLINE	08/03 Mali capital boosts security fearing attacks
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/malis-capital-bamako-boosts-security-fearing-jihadi-attacks-87915724
GIST	<p>BAMAKO, Mali -- In Bamako's popular Darsalam neighborhood, a young gendarme stands by a newly barricaded street, his hand on the trigger of a rifle pointed slightly to the ground.</p> <p>The armed policeman is a sign of how Mali's bustling capital of more than 2.5 million people on the banks of the Niger River is on heightened alert as jihadi attacks have moved perilously close to the city.</p> <p>At least 15 extremist attacks hit Mali in June and July, the most daring when jihadi fighters attacked Kati, the country's largest military base, just 15 kilometers (9 miles) outside the capital.</p> <p>The growing insecurity in Mali, a sprawling country of 20 million people, has increased instability in West Africa's volatile Sahel region. Mali has had two coups since 2020 in which the military has vowed to do more to stop the jihadi violence.</p> <p>In recent months the junta's leader, Col. Assimi Goita, who had himself appointed transitional president, has ordered French troops and a European Union force to leave the country. The junta has also restricted the operations of a U.N. peacekeeping force. Instead, Mali's military is working with the Russian mercenary outfit, the Wagner Group. The Malian government officially denies the presence of the Russian mercenaries, although several European diplomats have cited evidence that Wagner is in Mali.</p> <p>"The withdrawal of the French forces has certainly left a vacuum, especially at the intelligence level, and this puts Bamako and other areas of the country in a more vulnerable position against jihadist groups, and through previous experience, preventing infiltration and attacks is very difficult," said Rida Lyammouri, senior fellow at the Policy Center for the New South.</p> <p>"If these groups can infiltrate and attack Mali's most protected base at Kati, then they can do the same against strategic locations in Bamako," warned Lyammouri.</p> <p>The pace of the jihadi attacks has increased and in June a leader of the al-Qaida-linked group JNIM issued a threat that the capital would soon be directly attacked.</p> <p>The United States is moving all nonessential staff out of Bamako and like many other Western countries has advised travelers to avoid visiting Mali.</p> <p>Mali's military has tightened security in the capital and has closed major roads "to counter this terrorist threat in both Kati and Bamako. Some roads leading to the military camp or to the residence of the</p>

transitional president are also cut off,” Col. Souleymane Dembele, spokesman for the Malian army, told The Associated Press. “Every day we arrest terrorists in Bamako or nearby.”

Although the ramped-up security is to protect citizens, some of the measures have been detrimental to ordinary residents.

Assa Diakite looked with dismay at her ruined corn field near the military camp at Bamako's airport, in a video posted on social media. Her entire crop had been cut down by the army as a security measure, she said.

“I've been farming here for 25 years and there has been no problem until now,” she said. “The soldiers who cut down my crop say the corn plants blocked visibility around their camp and allowed jihadi rebels to hide in the fields to attack them. That was not my wish. I am a widow, and it is thanks to these crops that I feed myself and my family. I ask transitional President Assimi Goita for help.”

A few days later, goodhearted citizens contributed money to help Diakite and other farmers whose fields had been cut down.

But even those acts of generosity may come under attack by jihadi rebels, who warn that cooperation with the military could lead to attacks by them. A recent jihadi audio message circulated over WhatsApp has created panic.

The jihadi message was directed to the people of Kati who after the July attack on the army barracks had vowed they would search all their houses to root out extremist rebels.

“When you see a kamikaze car (suicide bomb vehicle) coming from far away, taking care to avoid bars, concert venues, soccer stadiums, markets to target only a military camp, you should understand that (the military) is our target,” said the message.

“But if you show us that you and the army are the same thing, then why do we bother targeting only the military camp?” it warned ominously.

“This message is to tell people to be careful. ... If you push us to the extreme that's how we can react,” said Baba Alfa Umar, an independent geopolitical researcher who follows the situation in the Sahel.

Amid the military movements, the junta has taken steps to address Mali's political situation and prepare the way for new elections, which it says will be in February 2024. Last week, Mali's transitional government appointed a team to draft a new constitution within two months.

A key point will be if Mali continues to be a secular state. In 2012 extremist rebels linked to al-Qaida started their attacks saying they were fighting for Mali to be governed by Muslim Shariah law.

“The question of secularism and the place of religion in the Malian constitution,” is the crucial question to be decided in drafting the new document,” said Gilles Yabi, director of the West African Citizen think tank, Wati.

“The main question that interests Western partners and necessarily other Malians is the place of religion in politics. Should there be a separation between the religious sphere and the political sphere?” said Yabi. He said while the majority of people in Mali are Muslim, “there are Malian civil society actors that will also push for the Republic of Mali to remain secular.”

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HEADLINE	08/03 Taliban weigh response to Zawahiri death
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/03/tricky-situation-taliban-unsure-how-to-respond-to-zawahiris-death

Senior Taliban commanders weighing up how to respond to the [US assassination of al-Qaida's leader in Kabul](#) are caught between their hopes for international recognition and pressure from their own ranks.

Nearly three days after Ayman al-Zawahiri [was struck by a drone](#) in the heart of one of the most elite neighbourhoods of the Afghan capital, the Taliban have barely responded.

The killing of such a high-profile guest was a counter-terror coup for Washington, and a security and intelligence failure for the [Taliban](#). It has also created a major internal and international crisis for the group.

Nearly a year after seizing control of [Afghanistan](#) they are still seeking diplomatic recognition for their government, which they hope will curb an economic crisis by allowing for the lifting of sanctions and the release of frozen funds. An aggressive response to Zawahiri's death would not further that cause.

But al-Qaida and its leadership are revered by many in the group's ranks, who are also likely to see a drone strike in the heart of the capital as an assault on their sovereignty.

A firefight in the heart of Kabul on Tuesday with Islamic State militants was a reminder that the group is under pressure inside Afghanistan from even more extremist groups, who are aiming to pick off disaffected Taliban fighters.

"For Taliban who want to have a good relationship with the west I think this is a very tricky political situation," said Bette Dam, analyst and author of a biography of the Taliban's founding leader, Mullah Omar.

"They need to comfort their fighters, by being harsh to the US ... At the same time, they want to be political in order not to lose the US."

So after Zawahiri's death the Taliban leadership has gathered to debate whether they should respond to the strike, and if so what approach to take, Reuters reported, citing senior figures in the movement.

Suhail Shaheen, the Taliban's designated delegate to the UN who is based in Doha, effectively acknowledged the group had not yet decided how to respond when he told journalists asking for comment on the strike: "I am awaiting details and reaction from Kabul. So far I have not received."

Kabul-based spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid issued only a short statement accusing America of violating the Doha agreement, which paved the way for its troop withdrawal. Some officials have said the house was empty but none have directly denied Zawahiri's death.

The Taliban had promised the US in Qatar that they would not offer haven to militant groups that may threaten America and its allies, and for nearly a year after seizing Afghanistan insisted they had stuck by that commitment.

Just two days before the strike, the Taliban's interior minister, Sirajuddin Haqqani, told an [Indian news outlet](#) that al-Qaida was "already dead" and "has no presence in Afghanistan".

At the time, Zawahiri was still alive, in a house thought to be rented by one of Haqqani's aides, in an enclave controlled by the minister's own faction of the Taliban.

It was an open secret among many circles in Kabul that [the area – a stone's throw from the diplomatic enclave and ministry buildings](#) – was filled with "Arabs", a barely veiled reference to foreign al-Qaida fighters, though the presence of their leader was likely a closely guarded secret.

He may have been kept there under a form of house arrest. The Taliban previously summoned Osama bin Laden to their then-capital of Kandahar in the mid-1990s, in an attempt to curb his activities or improve oversight.

It proved spectacularly unsuccessful and Zawahiri too seems to have operated effectively from his Kabul base, sending out messages and videos.

Like his former guest, Haqqani has a multimillion-dollar bounty on his head for his role in terror attacks, and is reportedly still so concerned about his own security that he regularly switches homes even in Kabul. So it is unclear why he thought the al-Qaida leader was safer staying in one place.

The US had long been clear that they would target Zawahiri, a key architect of the September 11 attacks on America, wherever they found him.

But the Taliban, having defeated America on the battlefield, apparently thought they could also hide one of the most wanted men in the world from its spies.

“The location of the strike is only about a five-minute walk from the German embassy, which itself is scarred from terrorism (a major Taliban attack in 2017), and the Taliban have been in talks with the Germans to try and bring back diplomats and German development aid,” said Graeme Smith, senior consultant with International Crisis Group, focused on Afghanistan.

“So this highlights the really audacious hosting the Taliban were trying to do, trying to host representatives of the international system, while also hosting radicals bent on tearing down that system.”

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HEADLINE	08/04 Fear, hiding for Afghans left behind 1yr ago
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/fear-hiding-frustration-afghans-left-one-year-us-evacuation-rcna41406
GIST	<p>One year has now passed since former Army Capt. Jeff Trammell began exchanging text messages in the middle of the night with his one-time Afghan interpreter, desperate to get him and his family on one of the last flights out of Kabul as the U.S. withdrew and the Taliban took control of the country.</p> <p>“Cover your daughters and stay in line,” he instructed.</p> <p>In the months since, the Department of Homeland Security has resettled more than 80,000 Afghan refugees, the vast majority of whom escaped before the end of the U.S. withdrawal in September 2021.</p> <p>But tens of thousands who wanted to leave were left behind. Trammell’s interpreter is still in hiding, too afraid to step outside for fear he and his family will be found and executed by the Taliban.</p> <p>“After Americans left Afghanistan, I passed one year of my life like a prisoner. No work, no food,” Trammell’s interpreter told NBC News. At night, the family goes to their rooftop to get their only breath of fresh air for the day, he said.</p> <p>Trammell says his interpreter has passed every step of the Special Immigrant Visa process that would allow him to be evacuated to the U.S., and the final step he needs to complete is an interview at an American embassy.</p> <p>“The problem is there is no embassy in Afghanistan,” Trammell said, noting his frustration that the U.S. is not conducting such interviews remotely over Zoom.</p> <p>For Afghans who helped American forces but were left behind after the U.S. evacuation, the past year has been marked by fear, hiding and frustration as prospects of securing a visa, let alone a flight out, have dwindled.</p> <p>For those who did make it out, advocates say, their fate is still not certain.</p>

The Biden administration admitted most evacuees on humanitarian parole, which allows for a two-year residency and work authorization. Congress has yet to pass a proposed bill that would allow more evacuees the chance to apply for a visa that would put them on a path toward permanent status and citizenship.

At a legal clinic held by refugee resettlement agency Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) in Alexandria, Va., last weekend, about 50 Afghans came looking for help, worried that their ability to live and work in the U.S. could come to an end in a year.

Though Afghans in the U.S. can apply for asylum, which would give them a pathway to permanent legal status, they face a backlog of hundreds of thousands of cases from other immigrants seeking asylum. They can also apply for a Special Immigrant Visa based on their involvement with U.S. troops, but that process can take years, said LIRS President and CEO Krish O'Mara Vignarajah.

A spokesperson for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) said the agency is "streamlining the processing of requests for work authorization, Green Cards, and associated services." The spokesperson also noted that USCIS has received over 2,400 applications for asylum from Afghans who were evacuated to the U.S., of which 250 have been approved.

"The United States has welcomed more than 80,000 Afghans through Operation Allies Welcome, providing them with support and assistance as they begin their new lives in America — and we are prepared to welcome additional Afghans over the coming weeks and months, including those who are at overseas transit locations awaiting clearance to come to the United States," the spokesperson said.

The Biden administration also granted Temporary Protected Status for all Afghans in the United States, temporarily blocking them from deportation. But Vignarajah said there is still uncertainty for Afghans navigating the process to live permanently and work in the U.S.

"It is creating a source of anxiety," said Vignarajah. She expects the Biden administration would not move to deport Afghans after their parole expires, but she urges Congress to pass legislation that would give them certainty should another administration challenge their ability to stay.

After the chaotic evacuation from Afghanistan followed by the long wait for asylum and Special Immigrant Visas, Vignarajah said, "They do not have complete faith that the U.S. will follow through on its promises."

Back in Afghanistan, those still seeking to come to the U.S. are largely being denied humanitarian parole by USCIS, which has stipulated that applicants must prove they would be targeted with violence if they stay in the Taliban controlled country. As of June, 93 percent of Afghans still in the country who sought humanitarian parole had been denied, according to USCIS data.

A USCIS official told NBC News that roughly 70 percent of pending applications for humanitarian parole are from Afghans still living in Afghanistan, where the closure of the U.S. embassy in Afghanistan is "complicating the completion" of some applications that would otherwise be approved.

According to a senior administration official, as of July more than 70,000 Afghans who applied for Special Immigrant Visas before September 2021 were still in Afghanistan.

Trammell's interpreter, who applied for Special Immigrant Visa status reserved for those who helped U.S. troops, received an email in July from the State Department's National Visa Center telling him that it had "received all of the fees, forms and documents required prior to attending an immigrant visa interview."

"Your petition is awaiting an interview appointment" at a U.S. embassy or consulate, said the email — though there is currently nowhere for the interpreter to schedule such an appointment.

The USCIS official said Afghans need to travel to a third country for an interview, but the interpreter fears he will be captured by the Taliban if he is caught trying to cross into Pakistan.

Despite the odds, he remains hopeful he will be able to give his daughters a future outside of Afghanistan and Taliban rule.

“Whatever I have is my daughters’,” he said. “I am so worried about their future. I don’t want to destroy my daughters’ future.”

Trammell said he knows some single men who served with American forces who were able to access visas and leave Afghanistan more quickly. But his interpreter is committed to staying with his family.

“They are all my life. I have nothing without them,” the interpreter said.

In a statement, a State Department spokesperson said, “We cannot comment on individual cases. Speaking more broadly, all visas must be processed in accordance with U.S. law, which include the requirement that immigrant visa (IV) applicants sign their applications biometrically ‘in the presence of the consular officer’ and attest to the veracity of the application through the oath administered by a U.S. consular officer.”

“While we are currently unable to provide consular services for immigrant visa applicants, including Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs), in Afghanistan, we continue to process SIV applications at every stage of the SIV process, including by transferring cases to other U.S. embassies and consulates around the world where applicants are able to appear.”

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	08/04 Not slowing: rise of billion-dollar disasters
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/interactive/2022/billion-dollar-disasters/?itid=hp_latest-headlines
GIST	<p>CRUSO, N.C. — A year after the remnants of Tropical Storm Fred dumped a foot of rain on parts of this mountain community, after the Pigeon River rose and raged and destroyed nearly everything in its path, the scars remain around every bend.</p> <p>Sherrie Lynn McArthur, owner of Laurel Bank Campground, is still surrounded by towering piles of mangled metal campers, appliances and other debris — a daily reminder of the catastrophe where four people perished in a flash flood that leveled a spot vacationers had flocked to for a half century.</p> <p>“Disasters happen,” she said on a recent evening as she surveyed the destruction. “But people don’t know that it lasts for more than a week or a month.”</p> <p>In this swath of western North Carolina, dozens of bridges were damaged and some wiped out altogether. Scores of homes were destroyed, and hundreds more left in disrepair. The state allocated nearly \$125 million for recovery, including funds to help displaced families and compensate for lost crops. The federal government has spent millions more to help homeowners and renters, as well as area business owners and local cleanup efforts.</p> <p>Tropical Storm Fred and its aftermath became merely one of the 20 “billion-dollar” weather and climate disasters tracked by the U.S. government last year — a collection of calamities that cost the nation an estimated \$145 billion and killed nearly 700 people.</p> <p>“They are not slowing down,” said Adam Smith, the U.S. government’s lead scientist for analyzing billion-dollar disasters.</p>

This mounting toll, which scientists and government officials say is driven in part because the world is warming, is forcing hard questions about who bears the burden of paying for them and how the nation can better prepare for what lies ahead. Ordinary Americans, often without adequate insurance, and local governments alike are ill-prepared for the sudden financial shocks such disasters can inflict. And elected leaders are scrambling to reinforce aging infrastructure built not only for a different century, but also for an earlier era of risks.

While weather disasters strike the United States every year, the numbers show that summer is proving prone to some of the most costly annual disasters, including powerful hurricanes, seemingly endless droughts, sprawling wildfires and torrential rainstorms that fuel the sort of flooding St. Louis and eastern Kentucky [have recently endured](#).

Over the past two years, for instance, the summer brought two catastrophic events — Hurricane Ida and Hurricane Laura — that together caused more than \$100 billion in damage and killed at least 138 people.

During summer in particular, many communities have had to grapple with compound, or cascading, disasters that hit in rapid succession. For instance, parts of California have seen wildfires followed by heavy rain and mudslides. A heat wave that descended after Hurricane Ida had knocked out power last summer left [already vulnerable residents](#) in Louisiana at more risk.

Even as such threats rise, Americans continue to flock to vulnerable places.

[According to the U.S. Census](#), people have continued to move in droves to the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, where seas are rising and hurricanes are intensifying. They have headed to California and other parts of the West, within reach of devastating wildfires.

The unprecedented flooding that ravaged this verdant corner of the Blue Ridge Mountains last August barely registered on a national scale. But it underscored how even disasters that don't wreak havoc across large geographic areas can inflict profound consequences long after they are gone. As such events happen more often, other vulnerable and unsuspecting communities are likely to face similar tragedies.

"Here's the news flash: We're not going to be the last small town that's going to see far from a normal amount of flooding," said Zeb Smathers, mayor of nearby Canton.

'The 800-pound gorilla'

A dozen miles from where the worst of the flooding took place in western North Carolina last summer, Smith has worked more than a decade as a scientist for NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information.

In the upstairs office at his home west of Asheville, an unmistakable pattern has unfolded in his spreadsheets.

"The frequency and the cost of U.S. weather and climate disasters is increasing," said Smith, who [tracks disasters](#) back to 1980, using an array of public and private data on everything from insurance payouts to infrastructure damage, to estimate their economic impact.

The data bear out that reality.

The United States has experienced an average of 7.7 billion-dollar disasters annually over the past four decades, Smith said. But in the past five years, that average has jumped to nearly 18 events each year. 2020 and 2021 saw the highest number of such disasters on record, with 22 and 20, respectively.

That list includes a wide range of catastrophes that span the country and the calendar, including a cold snap that crippled parts of Texas and hailstorms in Ohio. Spring has been an especially active time, the numbers show. But many of the most destructive and costly disasters of recent years also have come

during summer — including massive [Western wildfires](#), a [crippling heat dome in the Pacific Northwest](#) and devastating hurricanes such as Harvey, Maria and Ida.

“We’re starting to refer to the warm season as ‘danger season,’ because we’re seeing a lot of different kinds of climate hazards happening at the same time,” said Rachel Licker, principal climate scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Last year marked the seventh consecutive year in which the nation experienced 10 or more separate billion-dollar disasters. According to NOAA, the annual cost of such events has risen, with the 2010s proving “far costlier” than the several decades that preceded it.

There are numerous reasons that contribute to the troubling trend, according to researchers and public officials who have studied the changes, including ongoing development in disaster-prone areas and Americans’ push to live near the coasts.

But, Smith said, “Climate change is the 800-pound gorilla in the room.”

In places such as the Southeast, he said, a warming atmosphere means that the air holds more water vapor, fueling torrential rainstorms and more intense hurricanes that have led to catastrophic flooding. In the West, ongoing droughts have caused water shortages and created the conditions for megafires that burn across massive swaths of land.

“Climate change is enhancing some of the extremes that lead to billion-dollar disasters,” he said.

Smith wrote in a NOAA [analysis](#) earlier this year that climate change is “supercharging the [increasing frequency](#) and intensity of certain types of extreme weather that lead to billion-dollar disasters — most notably the rise in vulnerability to drought, lengthening wildfire seasons in the Western states, and the potential for extremely heavy rainfall becoming more common in the eastern states. Sea level rise is worsening hurricane [storm surge flooding](#).”

In a recent assessment of the current state of climate science, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [drew a similar conclusion](#). The panel wrote that as the planet grows warmer, more and potentially harsher events await.

“We will experience extreme events that are unprecedented, either in magnitude, frequency, timing or location,” IPCC authors wrote.

“The frequency of these unprecedented extreme events will rise with increasing global warming.”

‘It happened so quickly’

Travis Donaldson, emergency services director for Haywood County, was monitoring the heavy rainfall in the area that August afternoon last summer. He saw the water level rising along the Pigeon River near Cruso and Canton, not long before the calls for help began.

“It happened so quickly,” Donaldson said, adding, “It was like somebody flipped a light switch, and every phone line in the 911 center lit up.”

More than 70 people in the county were reported missing in the hours after the storm. Donaldson said emergency responders made more than two dozen documented rescues during the flooding, in addition to others undertaken by neighbors and bystanders.

Ultimately, 161 people from 85 families in Haywood County required long-term shelter, a spokeswoman said. Officials have removed 85,000 cubic yards of debris, and counting.

Then there is the emotional wreckage that remains.

Donella Pressley fled with her two young daughters, Cordelia and Elena, and an armful of family pictures just before a branch of the swelling river engulfed her house off Pisgah Drive. The family was able to return after more than seven months and numerous temporary moves, but even with her flooded floors and walls replaced, she lives with constant unease.

“I’ve just tried to brace my children that we do live by the river, and it’s possible this could happen to us again,” she said.

Bill Martin, a state rebuild coordinator for a [Baptist organization](#) that aids communities in the wake of disasters, has overseen a group that has renovated or rebuilt 73 homes, with many more to go.

“Mentally, it affected everybody up through here. Financially, it affected everybody, some more than others,” he said one afternoon as he put finishing touches of paint on a house off Cruso Road for a couple whose previous home was swept away by the river.

‘We are not prepared’

Adam Smith and others are quick to point out that while the warming climate has helped catalyze the rise in billion-dollar disasters, is it hardly the only factor.

“There’s no denying that the intensity of these disasters seems to be increasing, or the impacts seem to be increasing,” said William “Brock” Long, who headed the Federal Emergency Management Agency during the Trump administration. “But you can’t just say it’s climate change.”

He pointed to the fact that Americans have continued to flock to vulnerable areas such as coastlines, river floodplains and areas with greater wildfire risks.

The feverish growth of recent years, particularly in places where building codes are not always sufficient to account for the risk of extreme events, has put more lives and more assets in harm’s way.

“We’re all talking about climate change and how bad it’s going to be, but the incentives aren’t there for communities to do the right thing,” said Long, now the executive chairman of Hagerty Consulting, an emergency management consulting firm. “Nobody ever got elected” on a platform of more stringent building codes, he said.

In addition, Long said that a “financial lack of resilience” exists in many places around the country, where many homeowners are [uninsured or underinsured](#). It leaves them particularly vulnerable when disaster strikes.

“We’ve got some real social vulnerability issues we need to tackle,” Long said. “You’ve got a lack of insurance within the citizenry, a lack of insurance within our communities for public infrastructure. ... Until that changes, these disasters are going to get worse, and FEMA faces an impossible task.”

Threats still loom this summer. While scientists have predicted another active hurricane season, no major storms have yet hit U.S. coasts. Government officials also have forecast “[above normal](#)” potential for serious wildfires in the weeks and months ahead.

The accompanying risks, from overwhelmed electric grids to a lack of adequate cooling among certain populations, abound.

“We are not prepared right now. These disasters are increasing in frequency, and the nature of them is they are really dangerous and deadly events,” Licker said. “We’re not even prepared now, let alone for future conditions.”

And often, the impacts of extreme weather hit hardest among those who can least afford it.

“The most vulnerable populations are often those who pay the highest relative costs to recovering from disasters,” Smith said. “They just don’t have the financial safety net to recover and build back to where they were previous to the disaster.”

‘It sure took a toll’

Some of those vulnerabilities are painfully clear in the mountains of North Carolina a year after the catastrophic flooding that struck here on a summer afternoon.

Roads, bridges and other infrastructure were overwhelmed by the deluge. Local officials are eager for dollars and plans to make municipal buildings, homes and businesses more resilient to the next flood; their wish list includes everything from early-warning systems to more robust storm water drainage.

Nick Scheuer, the town manager of Canton, estimated the municipality sustained \$12 million to \$15 million in damage. Police, fire and other town officials continue to work out of temporary facilities.

The town’s annual budget comes to about \$11 million, he said, but “we spent close to \$4 million just in remediation of flood damage to our facilities, temporary offices and replacing basic equipment necessary for operation.”

Homeowners without insurance — or without adequate insurance — are struggling to rebuild, in some cases raising their foundations eight feet or more above the ground. After the last round of severe flooding in the area in 2004, some residents in the region sold their homes through government programs, which aimed to create a buffer near the river.

Now, more flood-prone properties could be eligible for buyouts. But for the moment, residents here say they have relied on a patchwork of aid from federal flood insurance, FEMA assistance, state disaster funding, relief from nonprofit groups and the kindness of friends and neighbors.

“We’re still in the picking-up-our-teeth phase of this,” said Smathers, the Canton mayor. But, he added, “It could happen again this year — that’s the thing. It could happen next week.”

These days, Martin lives in an RV nearby, working alongside colleagues to repair and rebuild what he can. “I can hardly explain the devastation,” he said, comparing the damage to what he once witnessed after a powerful tornado struck Moore, Okla. “It sure took a toll.”

At the Laurel Bank Campground, McArthur still fights back tears most days as she roams the debris-cluttered landscape.

“You’ve never seen such angry water,” she recalled, as she stood alongside the river that was flowing peacefully again, for now. She spoke of the campers who lost their lives in the flash floods, and how their loss haunts her.

“I live their memory every day.”

A few miles away, Donella Pressley’s daughters were giggling and playing on the bunk bed in their revamped bedroom. In the kitchen, standing by the new countertops that had been installed days before, Pressley looked out her window toward the river, only half a football field away.

“It’s a very uneasy feeling when it rains,” she said, describing how only weeks earlier, she briefly evacuated again when a downpour caused the rising waters to pool in her yard.

For now, she said, “We will live. And carry on.”

Still, she keeps suitcases packed under her bed and in her daughters’ room, so that they can flee quickly if the next disaster comes.

HEADLINE	08/04 Heat waves changing tourism in Europe
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/04/travel/heat-wave-europe.html
GIST	<p>It was the middle of July, peak summer travel season, and the news from Europe wasn't looking good: A heat-induced "surface defect" briefly closed the runway at London's Luton Airport. Trains were delayed or canceled across Britain because of overheated tracks. More than two dozen weather stations in France recorded their highest-ever temperatures. And wildfires blazed in tourist regions of France, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece, including just outside of Athens.</p> <p>"If you were in the center of town, you could look out and see the Acropolis, and in the distance you could see the red haze," said Peter Vlitaz, an executive vice president at Internova Travel Group, who was in Athens during the wildfires, which firefighters have since brought under control.</p> <p>Mr. Vlitaz added that he could smell the smoke from his hotel and sometimes had to close his door to prevent fine ash from blowing into his room. But life in Athens, he said, went on pretty much as usual. "The taverns are full at night and the cabbies are busy, which is always a great barometer," said Mr. Vlitaz, still in Athens. "Greece is experiencing what the rest of Europe has — a record number of tourists."</p> <p>After more than two years of putting off their vacations, travelers are loath to cancel their trips, even in the face of headline-making weather. But several people in the industry described a growing number of travelers who are adjusting their plans to account for high temperatures, whether by swapping out destinations, reworking their daytime schedules, or delaying their trips by a month or two.</p> <p>Given the pace and trajectory of climate change, such shifts are likely to become more common — and more necessary — in the years ahead. That's especially true for travel to Europe, a region that climate researchers have described as a "hot spot" for severe summer heat, and where they predict that future heat waves will be longer, more frequent and more intense.</p> <p>Even with this summer's high tourist numbers, there are already subtle signs that the heat is driving changes that could become the future norm. Europe's summer travel calendar has begun to stretch into the quieter (and cooler) months of April, May, September and October, while many travelers are starting to shift their itineraries northward and toward the coasts.</p> <p>Shifting itineraries</p> <p>Karen Magee, a senior vice president and general manager at In the Know Experiences, said that, beginning in mid-July, her travel agency started getting calls from clients asking if they could adjust their travel plans to account for the heat.</p> <p>"That was new," Ms. Magee said. "I can't remember the last time we had people calling and saying, 'Maybe we're going to skip Rome and opt for a more beach-accessible city.' Or maybe they shortened their itinerary in the city and opted to go into the country a little sooner than they had planned."</p> <p>Dolev Azaria, the founder of Azaria Travel, helped one family make the last-minute choice to spend the first five days of their vacation in Amsterdam instead of Rome, just to avoid the heat. Other clients scrapped their plans for Tuscany and rebooked for Sicily, where at least they would have a Mediterranean breeze.</p> <p>"The goal is to move a client from any heat-trapped city to a waterfront vicinity," Ms. Azaria said. "So places like Copenhagen and Amsterdam have come up, places that maybe our clients wouldn't have originally chosen to go to."</p> <p>But Ms. Azaria said that, so far, she hasn't had any complete cancellations: "There's been so much pent-up demand. We're basically condensing two years of travel into this summer."</p> <p>Looking ahead to next year, Ms. Azaria is planning for an elongated summer travel season: "We're already seeing that summer really extends through the end of September, even until mid-October," she said.</p>

Any travelers who might consider bailing on a trip because of extreme heat may discover that their cancellation policies leave little opportunity for a refund. Clients of Jude Vargas, a travel adviser and founder of [Pyxis Guides](#), were worried about the heat on an upcoming family trip to Portugal, but they ended up sticking with it.

“They were concerned about their kids being outside,” Ms. Vargas said. “But because of the cancellation policies, they just realized, ‘OK, we’re committed.’”

Even travel insurance is unlikely to cover travelers who cancel a trip because of a heat wave, said Dan Drennen, director of sales and marketing at [Travel Insurance Center](#). The only policy that would apply in such a scenario is “cancel for any reason” insurance, Mr. Drennen said. He added that this kind of insurance is typically about 40 percent more expensive than normal coverage, and it generally refunds a maximum of 75 percent of the total trip cost. He advised travelers to do their research and speak to a broker before they buy insurance, so they understand what’s covered and what isn’t.

“People assume that these policies do everything, and they don’t,” Mr. Drennen said.

Adjusting on the road

Those who are committed to traveling can take a number of practical steps to manage the heat. Ms. Vargas has been helping her clients shift their afternoon tours to the cooler evening hours, but because this travel season is so busy, last-minute spots can be hard to find. She also recommends traveling with a spray bottle with a fan attached, a portable device that she described as “a saving grace, especially if you’ve got kids.” Having an umbrella to use as a sunshade can also help. She added that, looking ahead to travel next year, she’s focusing on months like May and October.

Héctor Coronel Gutierrez, the director of tourism at the Madrid City Council, advised visitors who travel to his city in high summer to seek out green spaces, including the Madrid Río Park, which has many shady areas as well as a fountain area where children can splash in the water. He added that, while July and August are hot, the city tends to be quieter than in May and June, so it’s easy to avoid crowds.

It’s also easy to find air conditioning in Spain, although American visitors might find buildings warmer than they’re used to. Earlier this week, in a bid to reduce energy consumption, the Spanish government announced that shopping centers, movie theaters, airports and other venues would [no longer be allowed](#) to set their thermostats below 27 degrees Celsius, or 80.6 degrees Fahrenheit.

Still, the travel writer and tour operator [Rick Steves](#), who recently returned from Spain, said that summer travelers may actually find themselves more comfortable in Madrid than in a city like London, Paris or Frankfurt, where high temperatures — and air conditioning — aren’t the norm.

“Places that are accustomed to crazy heat, like Spain, well, they have a lifestyle that accommodates that — they have a siesta, they have canvas awnings over the walkways so people can have shade while they walk around, they have restaurants that are designed to let people eat in breezy spots,” Mr. Steves said.

In addition to practical steps like wearing sunscreen and drinking plenty of water, Mr. Steves advised travelers to book their museum tickets in advance to avoid standing in line in the heat. When planning future trips, he echoed Ms. Vargas in recommending that people consider traveling during the “shoulder season,” which his tour company now defines as April and October — no longer May and September.

“This is an adjustment period as we regear to live through worsening impacts of climate change,” said Mr. Steves, who pointed out the irony of travelers complaining about the higher temperatures even as they hopped on their carbon-heavy flights to Europe. He suggested carbon offsets, but experts generally agree that those programs alone [cannot cover](#) the full carbon cost of our flights.

Even if we stopped all greenhouse gas emissions today, a certain amount of additional warming is already baked into the system, said Dr. Rebecca Carter, who leads climate adaptation work at the [World Resources](#)

	<p>Institute, a think tank based in Washington, D.C. But we haven't stopped spewing climate-warming gases: Carbon dioxide emissions are on the rise, and the planet is warming faster than ever.</p> <p>This summer's intense heat "is not a fluke," Dr. Carter said, but rather "the beginning of a trend that we're going to see more of."</p> <p>The evidence on the ground in Europe is clear: In Britain, the 10 hottest years in the record books (which go back to 1884) have all occurred in this century. In Germany, the average annual number of "hot days" (those with temperatures reaching 30 degrees Celsius — 86 degrees Fahrenheit — or higher) has trended significantly higher since the 1950s. And in France, scientists have calculated that average temperatures in the northeastern city of Strasbourg are now roughly equivalent to those seen in Lyon, which lies about 240 miles to the south-southwest, in the 1970s.</p> <p>Dr. Carter added that climate change will continue to come in the form of heat waves and other extreme weather events, many of which will disrupt travel logistics. (She pointed out that planes aren't certified to fly above certain temperatures, a limit that has already grounded flights in the past.) But when it comes to individual travel decisions, a lot of it will come down to personal tolerance.</p> <p>"In the long list of factors that we all go through when we're deciding where to go, when to go, whether to go," Dr. Carter said, "the weather and climate change should be part of the calculus."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Dutch government declares water shortage
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/dutch-government-declares-water-shortage-due-drought-2022-08-03/
GIST	<p>AMSTERDAM, Aug 3 (Reuters) - The Dutch government on Wednesday declared a water shortage, following an unusually dry summer with no rain forecast for the coming two weeks.</p> <p>Brutal heatwaves gripped large parts of Europe and the United States last month, bringing about calls for more efforts to tackle global warming, which scientists say makes spells of extremely hot weather more frequent and deadly. read more</p> <p>With two-thirds of the Dutch population living below sea level, droughts can quickly become an acute problem in the Netherlands, leading to rivers silting up and hampering water traffic.</p> <p>A further problem arises from dikes drying out - many require the weight of water itself to remain strong.</p> <p>"We have been seeing it get drier in the Netherlands for several weeks now because of evaporation in our own country and very low river flows from abroad," said Michele Blom of the country's Public Works and Water Management agency, appointed to oversee a drought task-force.</p> <p>At the moment, barges on the lower Rhine - an important route for transporting coal from Rotterdam inland to German steelmakers and power producers - are operating at less than half capacity.</p> <p>The Dutch ministry of infrastructure and transportation said that as of Tuesday, water was flowing through the Rhine at 850 cubic meters per second at Lobith, the eastern town where it enters the Netherlands, "exceptionally low for the time of year."</p> <p>Levels were better in the Maas, also known as the Meuse, which flows from France into the Netherlands.</p> <p>The IJsselmeer, a large artificial freshwater lake in the north of the country that was carved out from the North Sea in the 20th century, is reasonably filled and can supply water to the province of Groningen.</p>

	<p>However, groundwater levels are sinking and "are very low in places in the south," the ministry said, leading to algae blooms and fish death.</p> <p>Drinking water is not affected.</p> <p>Water districts are calling for people to conserve water, with southern provinces of Zeeland and Limburg asking people not to use surface water for watering -- a measure that affects farmers.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 NICC: thousands of lightning strikes
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/thousands-of-lightning-strikes-hit-nw-after-heat-wave/
GIST	<p>Following last week's intense heat wave, the Pacific Northwest on Monday saw an unusually high number of lightning strikes, according to the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center.</p> <p>Monday night thunderstorms produced 3,577 lightning strikes, mostly in south central Oregon with a few strikes in northeastern Washington and along the west side of the Cascades.</p> <p>This is about 5% of the average number of lightning strikes (67,723) in the Pacific Northwest each year, according to the agency.</p> <p>The agency reported south central to southeast Oregon saw a third consecutive day of isolated thunderstorms Tuesday, with about 1,000 lightning strikes.</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	08/03 Mexico: journalist killed; 13th this year
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/mexico-caribbean-journalists-80bc999b5b041ef162332dbf686f8112
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY (AP) — A journalist was among four people killed inside a beer shop in central Mexico, the 13th media worker killed in the country this year.</p> <p>San Luis de la Paz Mayor Luis Sánchez said Ernesto Méndez, director of the news site Tu Voz, or Your Voice, was with four other men when they were attacked. The fifth person was seriously wounded and taken to a hospital, he said.</p> <p>Guanajuato Gov. Diego Rodríguez Vallejo condemned the Tuesday night killings via Twitter Wednesday.</p> <p>Sánchez said that at this point it was unknown whether the attack was related to Méndez's journalistic work, his role as representative of local businesses in the planning of an upcoming fair or something else.</p> <p>Press freedom organization Article 19 called on the government to offer protection to Méndez's colleagues and relatives.</p> <p>Méndez had also worked until three years ago at the news site Zona Franca, according to its director Carmen Martínez.</p> <p>It was not immediately clear whether Méndez was enrolled in the federal government's protection program for journalists and human rights defenders under threat.</p>

	While organized crime is often involved in journalist killings, small town officials or politicians with political or criminal motivations are often suspects as well. Journalists running small news outlets in Mexico's interior are easy targets.
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HEADLINE	08/04 Foreign agent laws to curb Russia influence
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/beyond-yachts-planes-us-turns-foreign-agent-laws-curb-russian-influence-2022-08-04/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK, Aug 4 (Reuters) - In the five months since the U.S. Department of Justice launched a task force to seize Russian oligarchs' assets to pressure Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine, prosecutors also have targeted something less tangible: Russia's influence.</p> <p>Prosecutors in that period have charged five Russians with acting on the Kremlin's behalf without registering as foreign agents, as the Justice Department broadly ramps up enforcement of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) and a related law known by its code number, 951.</p> <p>FARA and 951 let prosecutors go after broader activity - such as lobbying or running media campaigns - than espionage statutes, which focus on agents seeking classified or military information, experts said.</p> <p>"The Russian playbook is so much bigger than that," said David Aaron of law firm Perkins Coie, a former national security prosecutor.</p> <p>In the latest instance, federal prosecutors in Tampa, Florida, last week charged Russian national Aleksandr Ionov with 951 conspiracy for financially supporting U.S. political groups.</p> <p>In an interview with Reuters on Tuesday, Ionov - who is in Russia - called the U.S. charges "complete nonsense" and a "political decision."</p> <p>The charges against the Russians come as U.S. prosecutors increasingly wield the two foreign-influence laws, which they previously used only rarely, against a variety of defendants.</p> <p>Since 2018, the United States has accused 52 people - including Russian, Chinese and American citizens - of violating or conspiring to violate FARA, 951 or both, according to a Reuters analysis of Justice Department statements and records from seven major district courts. In the prior six-year period, just 13 people were charged under those laws, the analysis shows.</p> <p>Of the 52 people, 13 have since pleaded guilty, including Maria Butina, a Russian student who in 2018 admitted to 951 conspiracy by trying to create back channels between Moscow and Republican politicians.</p> <p>Others charged include Thomas Barrack - a fundraiser for former president Donald Trump's 2016 campaign - who will stand trial next month on charges under 951 of illegally lobbying for the United Arab Emirates. Barrack pleaded not guilty.</p> <p>Federal prosecutors have also charged several alleged Chinese agents this year and in 2020. Some have pleaded not guilty and others are at large.</p> <p>The Justice Department declined to comment. Russia has denied interfering in the U.S. election and calls its campaign in Ukraine a "special military operation." Its embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>CONFERENCE IN YALTA, FORT IN HAWAII</p> <p>Section 951 was passed as part of the 1917 Espionage Act - enacted partly to combat resistance to the World War One draft - and criminalizes acting as a foreign agent without notifying the U.S. attorney general. While once mainly used against traditional espionage, cases brought in recent years have targeted lobbying and influence operations.</p>

FARA was enacted in 1938 to counter Nazi propaganda. It requires foreign lobbyists to register with the Justice Department. Prosecutors brought a handful of FARA cases in the postwar era; in recent decades, they were wary of bringing charges under an untested statute, experts said.

But in 2019, a Justice Department official said at a legal conference that prosecutors would focus more on FARA in a "big shift" spurred by Russia's alleged interference in the 2016 presidential election.

"For national security issues, FARA has become one of the first tools out of the bag," said Matthew Sanderson of Caplin & Drysdale.

In addition to Ionov, the other Russians charged recently include Aleksandr Babakov - a Vladimir Putin-aligned Russian parliament member - and two of his staffers. They were accused in April of hiring consultants to lobby U.S. members of Congress to advance Russia's interests.

Babakov directed an unnamed U.S. associate to invite a U.S. congressman to a 2017 conference in Yalta sponsored by the U.S.-sanctioned leader of Crimea, prosecutors said. The unnamed congressman did not attend.

Babakov could not be reached for comment.

In March, prosecutors accused Elena Branson, a U.S.-Russian dual national, of violating 951 and FARA by receiving \$170,000 in Russian state funds to organize an "I Love Russia" campaign for U.S. youth. She also lobbied Hawaiian officials not to change the name of a formerly Russian fort, prosecutors said.

In an October 2021 interview with Russian state broadcaster RT after returning to Russia, Branson said she did not communicate with U.S. politicians. In a March 8 Facebook post, Russia's embassy in Washington called the charges against Branson "unfounded."

Branson, Babakov and Ionov are believed to be in Russia.

They are unlikely to be arrested by U.S. authorities, but charging fugitives sends a message to Moscow to thwart further activity, said Brandon Van Grack, a partner at Morrison Foerster and former chief of DOJ's FARA unit.

"It is a way to deter the other government - to say 'look, we know what you're doing here, so stop it,'" he said.

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HEADLINE	08/03 Sophisticated NY crime group busted
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/sophisticated-criminal-group-terrorizing-manhattan-busted-in-sweeping-takedown/3805710/
GIST	<p>More than a dozen alleged members of a highly sophisticated criminal group tied to a series of murders, attempted murders, violent armed robberies and shootings in Manhattan over the last year are charged in a 90-count felony indictment out of Manhattan and face RICO charges as part of a sweeping joint investigation, authorities say.</p> <p>Ten of the defendants are covered in the Manhattan indictment, which includes multiple counts of enterprise corruption, reflecting the sophisticated nature of the operation. Federal RICO charges against the other six members of the group, known as "Own Every Dollar" (O.E.D.), were also unsealed as part of the parallel Southern District of New York probe.</p> <p>According to court papers and authorities, O.E.D. members terrorized multiple Manhattan neighborhoods over the course of a year, targeting nightclubs and restaurants in Washington Heights, Midtown and the Lower East Side. It was allegedly part of highly structured criminal operation that involved oaths of</p>

loyalty, meetings to plan criminal behavior and written rules that could be changed only by a membership vote.

The group facilitated its own reputation by having certain individuals commit acts of violence for position-jockeying alone, both to improve their statuses within O.E.D. and to improve the status of the group itself, prosecutors said.

Some members rented luxury vehicles to use as getaway cars, while others were allegedly tasked with acquiring guns and scouting out potential victims. According to court documents, some members of the group committed robberies while others fenced stolen jewelry and watches. When victims resisted, they were pistol-whipped or shot, court papers say.

A few robberies and one shooting happened in the Bronx, prosecutors said, but the overwhelming majority of the violence was confined to the borders of Manhattan.

Among the alleged crimes in the indictment: Members of O.E.D. allegedly shot and killed a man, Jeffrey Sanchez, as he walked toward his parked car outside the Opus Lounge on West 202nd Street in September 2021. Two O.E.D. members charged him, with one shooting him in the back, prosecutors say. The duo then stood over the dying man, ripping his watch and jewelry off him as he lay motionless on the sidewalk, according to court documents.

The indictment covers three other non-deadly shootings and 15 armed robberies, with the frequency of the robbery sprees intensifying in the fall of 2021, prosecutors said. At least 14 different firearms were acquired and used by O.E.D. in the year-long window described in the indictment, authorities say.

The 10 defendants hail from Manhattan, Queens and the Bronx as well as Paterson, New Jersey. None faces fewer than seven felony counts.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg accused O.E.D. of wreaking havoc on New York City streets.

"This carefully structured criminal enterprise developed elaborate schemes to carry out robberies and violence, including tracking their victims before premeditated attacks," Bragg said in a statement. "Today we have made New Yorkers safer by taking major violence drivers off the street, but we know we have much more work to do."

NYPD Commissioner Keechant Sewell also ripped the defendants.

"These individuals lived by a brutal code of street violence – where firearms were recklessly pulled out and indiscriminately fired, where innocent lives were disregarded, where families and neighborhoods were traumatized and torn apart," Sewell said. "Now they will no longer be able to terrorize New Yorkers. And make no mistake: Organized groups like this do terrorize. They sow fear and disorder, and they show zero respect for the lives of the people who reside and work in the neighborhoods where they wreak havoc. The vast resources and untiring efforts of the NYPD and our law enforcement partners, across multiple agencies, are concentrated on the nexus of gangs, guns, and drugs that drive much of the crime in New York City. And all the people we serve are safer today because of our collaboration."

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HEADLINE	08/03 B.C. police: 11 men gang link warning
SOURCE	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/police-warn-gang-members-1.6540429
GIST	<p>The agency tasked with investigating organized crime and gang conflict in B.C., along with its affiliated policing partners, is issuing a public warning about 11 men with alleged gang connections it says pose a safety risk to the public.</p> <p>The Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit of British Columbia (CFSEU-BC) says the men are known to police and have connections to high levels of gang and organized crime-related violence.</p>

"Police believe that anyone with, or in the proximity to these individuals, may be putting themselves at risk," the agency said in a statement.

"CFSEU-BC, in collaboration with its partners, is issuing a public warning and identifying them in order for family, friends, associates, and the public to take measures to increase their own personal safety."

It says the warning applies to the following men:

- Shakiel Basra: 28 years old
- Jagdeep Cheema: 30 years old
- Barinder Dhaliwal: 39 years old
- Gurpreet Dhaliwal: 35 years old
- Samroop Gill: 29 years old
- Sumdish Gill: 28 years old
- Sukhdeep Pansal: 33 years old
- Amarpreet Samra: 28 years old
- Ravinder Samra: 35 years old
- Andy St Pierre: 40 years old
- Richard Joseph Whitlock: 40 years old

The CFSEU says gang-related conflicts throughout the Lower Mainland have resulted in homicides and attempted homicides in recent months in public places and police expect the violence to continue. It's asking the public to avoid these individuals it says may be targets for future violence.

Vancouver Deputy Chief Fiona Wilson said Wednesday at a news conference that the brother of two men on the list has already been killed. Meninder Dhaliwal was shot to death outside a Whistler hotel last month.

"I want to make it clear that today's announcement is not about naming and shaming," said Wilson. "Identifying these men is in the interest of public safety."

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HEADLINE	08/03 Seattle shootings on pace to break record
SOURCE	https://www.kpvi.com/news/national_news/number-of-shootings-in-seattle-on-pace-to-break-record/article_87ef20f7-1679-5b5f-a538-090a40fe71d6.html
GIST	<p>(The Center Square) – The number of shootings in the City of Seattle in 2021 represented a 10 year high, but 2022 is on pace for even higher numbers.</p> <p>There were more than double the amount of shootings in 2021 (174) as compared to 2013 (70). In the current year, the number of shootings is on pace to pass the 2021 total.</p> <p>As of June 30, there had been 99 shootings. That's more than the 68 shootings in the 2021 year to date total, according to Seattle's crime dashboard.</p> <p>There are already as many fatal shootings (21) through the first six months of 2022 as there were all of 2020. There were 31 fatal shootings in all of 2021.</p> <p>As part of an investigative series on the Seattle Police Department's efforts to reinvent policing in Seattle, The Center Square has looked at how that has been progressing.</p> <p>The city's plan has funding and staffing is now down to around 370 deployable officers, according to SPD Chief Adrian Diaz. This has caused response times for 911 calls deemed not an emergency to rise to an hour and 40 minutes as of June 30, according to Mayor Bruce Harrell's SPD Recruitment and Retention Plan.</p>

	<p>“Because of the shortage of officers, SPD often limits patrol dispatches only to Priority 1 calls [which are] life threatening emergencies, serious crimes in progress and other circumstances where police are immediately needed with a target response time of seven minutes,” the plan states. “SPD has historically dispatched officers to other lower priority calls, however, officers are now rarely dispatched to these calls for service due to the current staffing crisis.”</p> <p>When the city released the 2022 proposed budget, 23% of the general fund was dedicated to SPD.</p> <p>Mayor Harrell, Seattle City Council and SPD did not provide comment to The Center Square regarding the rate of shootings.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Colombia drug lord: stop killing cops
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/m7gg44/colombia-otoniel-message-killing-police
GIST	<p>Colombia’s most-wanted drug lord just sent a message to his old associates from the U.S. prison where he’s currently locked up: Please stop killing police officers.</p> <p>Dairo Antonio Úsuga, better known as “Otoniel,” sent a letter through his attorney calling for the Gulf Clan, a guerrilla group turned drug cartel, to “cease all the attacks against official forces in Colombia because it is harmful for the society.”</p> <p>Right after Úsuga’s apprehension in October last year, Gulf Clan members started a series of attacks against policemen in all of the regions under their control, in an attempt to force authorities to release their old boss. As of June, at least 30 police officers have been killed in more than 300 attacks, according to local investigators.</p> <p>But after two months of being behind bars in a U.S. federal prison, Úsuga, who rose to be the most-wanted drug boss in Colombia, now wants peace.</p> <p>“This is a call also to the new government to seek a peace agreement, longed by all the Colombians,” he wrote in the letter.</p> <p>The last time Colombia had a killing spree of its police officers was in 2017, when the Gulf Clan killed around 20 policemen in a similar time frame in another attempt to demand the release of some of its members.</p> <p>Úsuga’s attorney in the U.S., Alexei Schacht, confirmed the authenticity of the letter and its message, which was delivered to a judge Tuesday. But he couldn’t share any further information as to why his client was calling for peace.</p> <p>Úsuga was extradited to the U.S. on May 5 to face charges of drug trafficking and money laundering and pleaded not guilty on his first court appearance, according to court documents.</p> <p>On July 1, Úsuga’s sister, Nini Úsuga, known as “La Negra,” was also extradited from Colombia to the U.S. to face drug trafficking charges.</p> <p>The huge loads of cocaine Úsuga allegedly smuggled, drew comparisons to popular narco boss Pablo Escobar and the infamous Medellin Cartel.</p> <p>“The arrest was only comparable to the fall of Pablo Escobar,” former Colombian President Ivan Duque said at the announcement of his apprehension.</p> <p>Úsuga’s arrest and extradition, however, has had little effect on his criminal enterprise. The Gulf Clan has increased its presence around Colombia with more than 5,000 members, according to a recent report by the Peace and Reconciliation Foundation (PARES).</p>

	<p>U.S. authorities believe the group is the Sinaloa Cartel’s main Colombian ally in the drug-trafficking and human-smuggling operations.</p> <p>During a status hearing for Úsaga Tuesday, his lawyer complained about the “isolation conditions” of his client who says he allegedly hasn’t been able to communicate with his family for more than a month, as required by law.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Uvalde school: no video on day of shooting
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/3add79/uvalde-school-district-claims-it-doesnt-possess-video-taken-day-of-school-shooting
GIST	<p>In response to a public-records request filed by Motherboard, a lawyer for a private firm working for the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District, or UCISD, claims that it possesses no footage taken between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. on May 24, the day when a gunman killed 19 children and two adults at Robb Elementary School and hundreds of law enforcement officers stood by for more than an hour and did nothing.</p> <p>This continues a pattern of scarcely believable responses to public-records requests from various Uvalde governmental bodies. Previously, lawyers for the City of Uvalde claimed it doesn’t have to release records because they could contain “highly embarrassing information” or regard “emotional/mental distress,” and the UCISD’s lawyers responded to a request in a way suggesting they either don’t understand Texas law or the English language.</p> <p>Originally, Motherboard requested “Any and all video footage recorded at Robb Elementary School on May 24, 2022 between the hours of 11 am and 4 pm. I am requesting all footage recorded by Robb Elementary School or the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District on dash cameras, body cameras, CCTV cameras, surveillance cameras, cell phone cameras, or other cameras owned or accessed by Robb Elementary or Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District, as well as any photos taken at the scene.”</p> <p>On July 5, more than a month after the initial request was filed, a lawyer for Walsh Gallego, a law firm that according to its website specializes in representing school districts and charter schools, sent Motherboard a copy of a letter they had sent to the state’s attorney general, Ken Paxton, asking him to review their determination that the district did not have to release the requested information because it’s confidential. On July 15, the same lawyer sent Paxton a letter withdrawing the request for review because, they wrote, “the UCISD does not possess the requested information.” Motherboard received the letter August 1.</p> <p>The lawyer did not respond to multiple calls from Motherboard seeking clarification on how the school district could possibly not possess any of the video footage described in the request, portions of which have been leaked to the news media and viewed by tens if not hundreds of millions of people.</p> <p>A consortium of media outlets filed a lawsuit against the Texas Department of Public Safety Monday, asserting that it is unlawfully withholding records the outlets have requested under Texas’ open-records law.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Ambush: man called 911 to lure deputies
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/this-was-an-ambush-man-called-911-to-lure-sc-deputies-into-shooting-sheriff-says-richland-county-sheriffs-department-joseph-shannonhouse-glass-to-the-face-eye-now-recovering-frederic-westfall-dead-by-suicide
GIST	COLUMBIA, S.C. (WACH) — A South Carolina deputy was injured after a shooting ambush incident early Wednesday morning.

According to Sheriff Leon Lott with the Richland County Sheriff's Department, a 911 dispatch received two calls from a man saying a woman was being assaulted and needed help around 5:30 a.m. on Wednesday. Lott said when three deputies arrived, the woman stated that she didn't call the police and she was not being assaulted.

As deputies were leaving the scene, they were ambushed by the man who actually made the 911 call.

Gunfire rang out and struck one of the deputies' cars. According to Lott, deputies could not immediately determine where the gunfire was coming from.

Instead of returning the gunfire, deputies established a perimeter and closed off the neighborhood.

Deputy Joseph Shannonhouse was shot and injured inside his car when the bullets struck the car, causing a window to break.

He suffered from glass to the face eye and is now recovering.

We are very lucky we didn't have an officer killed in an ambush like the incidents that happened in Spartanburg and Cayce," Lott said. "It's not because our shooter didn't try, he certainly did. These deputies have a dangerous job and I am thankful that he was able to go home to his family this morning."

Following a search of the area, a man identified as Frederic Westfall, 25, was found in the neighborhood driveway suffering from a gunshot wound. Westfall was pronounced dead at the scene.

According to deputies, Westfall had a rifle and appeared to have died by suicide. Lott added that he was in full tactical gear.

Officials said it is believed that Westfall lured deputies to the location with the intention of ambushing them.

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HEADLINE	08/03 Renton shooting: 1 dead, 1 injured
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/1-killed-1-injured-renton-shooting/ZL7WSLDFPJHERKEOVVP4VWN5FA/
GIST	<p>Renton police are investigating after two men were shot Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>According to the police department, officers were called to the 300 block of Wells Avenue North around 2:45 p.m. When they arrived, they found two men with "serious" gunshot wounds.</p> <p>One man was declared dead on scene, while the other was taken to Harborview Medical Center in critical condition, police said.</p> <p>The incident is being investigated as a homicide. Police said the man who died was in his 30s.</p> <p>Neighbors say drug use and loud parties are common in the area where the shooting happened.</p> <p>In fact, the issue was so bad that Renton's police chief heard from worried residents. Yet, in the weeks since, neighbors say the problems have continued.</p> <p>"It's like an open-air market," one neighbor said. "Weekends, you can see — they open up the hoods, open the doors and leave the door open, and they're walking through the streets and they're just stoned out of their brain..."</p> <p>"And the frustrating thing is we even said this a month ago, 'Someone is going to get killed.'"</p> <p>While a shooter has not been identified, police said they do not think the shooter poses a danger to the public.</p>

HEADLINE	08/03 Racial disparity in Seattle police stops
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/mistaken-detention-of-black-seattle-driver-prompts-lawsuit/
GIST	<p>Anthony Sims was making an early morning delivery to a downtown Seattle 7-Eleven on May 17, 2020, when he noticed a Seattle police cruiser following him. As he parked and stepped out of his car, the cruiser's emergency lights activated and an officer, weapon drawn, ordered him back into his car.</p> <p>Within minutes, seven additional officers, guns out, surrounded Sims, who is Black. He was ordered to walk backward toward the officer who stopped him and told to lift his coat and spin around to show he wasn't armed.</p> <p>"It may be a misunderstanding," said the officer who conducted the stop.</p> <p>It was. Sims had done nothing wrong and was released within minutes of the encounter.</p> <p>The incident exemplifies findings by the Seattle Police Department's federal monitor earlier this year, and an independent study in 2021, showing Black people — and other people of color — are far likelier to find themselves at police gunpoint in Seattle than white people, even though Black people make up a fraction of the city's population.</p> <p>That discrepancy holds for the use of force by officers on the city's residents, even though the data shows white people are more likely to be armed when confronted by officers. Sims had no weapon when he was stopped.</p> <p>Sims has sued the Police Department over the stop, alleging the officer followed him for several blocks and detained him on a pretext because he's Black.</p> <p>"The only apparent reason [the officer] would have stopped Mr. Sims was his race," the lawsuit alleges.</p> <p>The federal monitor, appointed after the Department of Justice sued Seattle police in 2012 and the city entered into a consent decree, noted in a May assessment of the department's progress on court-mandated reforms that officers' use of force had "decreased significantly" over the past decade, including incidents where officers pointed their guns at people — considered a "Type I" use of force, the lowest category.</p> <p>The Justice Department lawsuit alleged Seattle officers routinely used excessive force when making arrests and found evidence of biased policing.</p> <p>Despite the overall improvements, the court-appointed monitor said Seattle police's data — which was unnecessarily incomplete — continues to show Black and Native American people "are disproportionately stopped, detained, and/or subjected to force by Seattle police," including the use of deadly force.</p> <p>While instances of pointing guns at Black people were down 66% between 2015 and 2021, the data showed they were still "most likely to be the subject of a firearm pointing despite being the subject of force less frequently than White subjects or subjects of unknown race."</p> <p>"Having a gun pointed at you is traumatic," said Antonio Oftelie, the monitor. "Over time, these practices erode the trust of the community."</p> <p>Oftelie's findings bolstered a July 2021 report from the Center for Policing Equity, which found that among subjects of police use of force, Black people "were overrepresented at a rate several times their 7% share of the city population."</p> <p>When it came to being held at gunpoint, 45% of the total instances involved Black people, the report found.</p>

Sims, who delivers for an app-based service, said the incident that May morning two years ago left him deeply shaken.

“When Seattle police ordered me out of my car at gunpoint, I was terrified of being shot. I felt violated,” he said. “The police targeted me because I had the audacity to drive while Black in Seattle. I do not feel safe driving in the city knowing that this is how SPD operates.”

Sims’ attorney, Nathaniel Flack, said officers endangered his client’s life “without justification ... as part of a well-documented pattern of unlawful stops and excessive force against people of color.”

According to Seattle police documents and an internal investigation by the Office of Police Accountability, the incident began when acting Lt. Robert Brown spotted Sims traveling east on Marion Street at 5:08 a.m. Brown noted in his report that Sims’ headlights were off, “despite it being dark.”

Brown ran the plate on his in-car computer and received a hit on a possible stolen vehicle out of Snohomish County. Brown radioed that he had a “possible rolling stolen” vehicle. While he was waiting for confirmation, according to the OPA report, the car pulled over outside the convenience store on First Avenue and Cherry Street, and Sims got out of the vehicle.

That’s when Brown turned on his overhead lights, drew his weapon, got on the car’s public-address system and ordered Sims back into the vehicle, according to the reports. At the same time, several nearby officers responded and prepared to conduct what Seattle police refers to as a “high-risk vehicle stop.” Seven additional officers were on the scene within minutes, surrounding Sims’ vehicle. The officers all exited their cruisers with weapons drawn, some pointing their guns at Sims, while others displayed theirs in the less-threatening “Sul” position — held close to the chest but pointed downward.

In his OPA interview, Brown said he could not tell the race of the driver when he first spotted the vehicle. The lawsuit notes Brown didn’t activate his emergency lights and initiate the high-risk stop until after Sims stepped out of the car.

With the other officers watching, Brown ordered Sims out of the car and told him to show his hands. Brown then ordered Sims to spin around with his coat raised to show he did not have a weapon and walk backward toward his voice.

According to the report and a review of dash- and body-worn camera video, a baffled Sims complied with the officer’s orders.

Even as he ordered Sims at gunpoint, Brown can be heard telling him, “I have no doubt that’s your vehicle,” and “sometimes there’s a misunderstanding.”

According to the lawsuit, by that point Brown and the other officers had been told by dispatch that the plate was legal and the car registered to Sims. The OPA investigation determined Brown transposed the last two digits of the plate when he input the number into his cruiser’s computer.

Even so, according to the lawsuit, three of the officers approached Sims’ car with guns up and searched its interior and trunk “without any probable cause or justification.”

The officers, the lawsuit alleges, “could see that Mr. Sims was African-American and were motivated to use unnecessary force by conscious or unconscious bias.”

The lawsuit alleges Brown’s initial decision to run the plate was motivated by bias and used as a pretext to stop Sims. According to the OPA investigation, sunrise that day was expected at 5:27 a.m., and the Seattle Municipal Code states headlights should be turned on a half-hour before sunset and can be turned off a half-hour before sunrise.

	<p>Brown began following Sims at 5:08 a.m.</p> <p>And while the OPA investigator and Brown's report state it was "dark" when Brown spotted the car, the dash-camera video clearly shows the sky lightening with the impending sunrise.</p> <p>None of the officers were disciplined. But OPA's director at the time, Andrew Myerberg, wrote a "Management Action Recommendation" suggesting the department provide training and "guidance on the requirements and limitations of [high-risk vehicle stops], including when it is appropriate for officers to conduct felony-level stops" with firearms drawn.</p> <p>Sgt. Patrick Michaud, a Seattle police spokesperson, said he could locate "no formal policy for a high-risk vehicle stop."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Spokane standoff ends; suspect dead
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/spokane-police-responding-dangerous-robbery-suspect-downtown-spokane/293-5b98d476-56a0-4dca-9c89-2372bea3c120
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — The robbery suspect has been confirmed dead by Spokane law enforcement. According to police, two SPD officers and a Spokane County deputy were involved in the standoff. One officer only suffered minor injuries.</p> <p>According to a press release from the Spokane Independent Investigative Team (SIIR), the Spokane County Sheriff's Office received a call regarding a robbery in Spokane Valley. At least one of the suspects was reported to have been armed.</p> <p>In a presser hosted by Spokane Police Chief Craig Meidl, details show that the incident occurred Wednesday morning shortly before 1 a.m. Officers located and followed the suspect's vehicle.</p> <p>As they were calling for more resources, two subjects fled the vehicle. The suspected driver then began to speed away with officers trailing. Meidl said the suspect then crashed his vehicle in the area of 500 East Third while officers detained the two who fled from the car.</p> <p>After barricading himself in the vehicle, the suspect exchanged gunfire with officers on scene. Meidl said that police don't believe the suspect was struck by any rounds at that time. An officer sustained minor injuries in the exchange, but was treated and released at the scene. Resources from SWAT, EDU, Spokane Regional Air Support Unit, Spokane County Sheriff's Office, Hostage Negotiation Teams and the Spokane Fire Department responded to support officers.</p> <p>Over the course of more than four hours, officers attempted to have the suspect exit the vehicle. According to Meidl, pepper balls and gas canisters were used. Multiple times, the suspect would throw the canisters back out of his vehicle.</p> <p>Law enforcement also noticed the suspect injecting drugs into himself while making profane gestures at officers, Meidl said.</p> <p>According to police, a fire started near the suspect's car that spread to nearby bushes and a building. It is unknown what caused the fire at this time, according to the SIIR Team.</p> <p>Around 6 a.m., the suspect exited the vehicle still armed. Meidl said it appeared the suspect was trying to target other officers. Soon after, more gunfire was exchanged between two SPD officers and a Spokane County Sheriff's deputy.</p> <p>After the suspect was hit, AMR services confirmed he was dead, according to Meidl.</p>

	<p>The investigation remains ongoing at this time and is being led by Washington State Patrol. All communication on the incident will be handled by the SIIR Team. The Spokane Police Department and Spokane County Sheriff's Office are expected to release the names of the officers and detective involved.</p> <p>Once the SIIR Team investigation is complete, the case will be forwarded to the Spokane County Prosecutor's Office for review.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Spain police probe nightclub needle jabs
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/spain-is-latest-nation-with-reports-of-nightclub-needle-jabs/
GIST	<p>MADRID (AP) — Police in Spain are investigating about 50 reported cases of women getting pricked with medical needles while at nightclubs or parties, a trend that previously came to the attention of authorities in other European countries.</p> <p>So far, Spanish police have not confirmed any cases of sexual assault or robbery related to the mysterious jabs. Police said that 23 of the recently reported needle attacks were in northeast Spain's Catalonia region, which borders France.</p> <p>Waves of needle pricks at musical events also have confounded authorities in France, Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands. French police have tallied over 400 reports in recent months, and said the motive of the jabs was unclear. In many cases, it also wasn't clear if the victims were injected with a substance.</p> <p>Spanish police so far have found evidence of drugs in one victim, a 13-year-old girl in the northern city of Gijón who had the party drug ecstasy in her system. Local media reported that the girl was quickly taken to hospital by her parents, who were near her when she felt a prick with something sharp.</p> <p>In an interview with national public broadcaster TVE that aired Wednesday, Spanish Justice Minister Pilar Llop urged everyone who thinks they received a shot without their consent to go to the police, since being stabbed with a needle "is a serious act of violence against women."</p> <p>Spanish health authorities said they were updating their protocols to improve the ability to detect any substances that were possibly injected into victims. The toxicological screening protocols call for blood or urine tests within 12 hours of a suspected attack, Llop said.</p> <p>The guidelines advise victims to immediately call emergency services and go to a health center as soon as possible.</p> <p>In southwest France, a spate of needle attacks were reported during the Bayonne Festival, which about 1.2 million people attended last week in the city near Spain's border.</p> <p>Bayonne Deputy Prosecutor Caroline Parizel said 124 people received medical examinations after they reported potential needle attacks. They included both women and men. Eleven filed legal complaints.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/04 Arrest: China kindergarten attack
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-kindergarten-attack-arrest-three-dead-six-injured/
GIST	<p><i>Beijing</i> — Police in southern China have arrested a 47-year-old man suspected of an attack that killed three people and injured six others at a kindergarten in Jiangxi province.</p> <p>Liu Xiaohui was arrested at 10:50 p.m. on Wednesday, about 12 hours after the morning attack, the Anfu county police said in a statement. He'd fled and gone into hiding, the statement said.</p> <p>Police didn't provide any information on the identity and ages of the victims.</p>

	<p>China's Global Times newspaper reported that at least one victim was a child and that the attacker is believed to have been armed with a knife.</p> <p>When police first put out word about the attack, they said a "gangster wearing a cap and mask" carried it out at a private kindergarten, Agence France-Presse reported.</p> <p>China upgraded security at schools following a spate of deadly attacks in recent years attributed largely to people bearing grudges against society or with mental illnesses.</p> <p>China doesn't allow private gun ownership, so most such attacks are carried out with knives, homemade explosives or gasoline bombs.</p> <p>Around 100 children and adults have been killed and hundreds injured over the past decade in apparently uncoordinated "lone wolf" attacks in which the motives were unclear. The mostly male assailants were either killed, took their own lives or were put on trial and executed.</p> <p>Acts of violence against China's youth resonate especially strongly due to the country's chronically low birth rate, partly due to decades of population control policies.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/03 Federal charges on 2 men: 4 July attack plot
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/federal-gun-charges-accused-plotting-july-attack-87888094
GIST	<p>RICHMOND, Va. -- A judge dismissed state gun charges Wednesday against two men who police said planned a Fourth of July mass shooting in Virginia's capital after charges were filed against the men in federal court.</p> <p>Neither man has been charged specifically with planning a mass shooting.</p> <p>Julio Alvarado-Dubon and Rolman Balcarcel-Bavagas, both Guatemalan immigrants, were charged in state court last month with possession of a firearm by a non-U.S. citizen. Richmond police held a news conference to announce that they had thwarted a July Fourth mass shooting planned by the men. The news conference was held just two days after a deadly mass shooting on the holiday in a Chicago suburb.</p> <p>Chief Gerald Smith said then that a "hero citizen" contacted police after overhearing a conversation indicating there was an attack being planned on an Independence Day celebration in Richmond. The caller said the attack was planned for the Dogwood Dell Amphitheater, where an annual fireworks show is held, Smith said.</p> <p>Richmond Commonwealth's Attorney Colette McEachin said Wednesday that her office asked federal authorities to take over the case.</p> <p>"These are two illegal aliens with guns so we wanted them prosecuted at the highest level possible," McEachin said.</p> <p>Alvarado-Dubon was charged Tuesday in federal court with possession of a firearm by a non-U.S. citizen. An affidavit filed in support of the criminal complaint against Alvarado-Dubon said he last entered the U.S. in 2014 and had overstayed his visa by more than seven years. His attorney, Jose Aponte, said he is scheduled to be arraigned Friday in U.S. District Court. Aponte declined to comment on the case.</p> <p>Balcarcel-Bavagas was charged in a federal criminal complaint with entering the U.S. illegally. His attorney, Samuel Simpson V, did not immediately respond to a call seeking comment. An affidavit written by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent said Balcarcel-Bavagas was deported twice previously — in 2013 and 2014 — and re-entered the U.S. illegally.</p>

	<p>During a hearing in Richmond General District Court Wednesday, Judge David Hicks asked a state prosecutor if there was any evidence that the mass shooting was planned for Dogwood Dell, the location Smith had cited.</p> <p>Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Clint Seal said there was evidence of a planned shooting, but not at a specific location.</p> <p>Hicks said he raised the issue because two of his sons were at Dogwood Dell on July Fourth. He said if there was evidence the shooting was planned for that location, he would have a conflict of interest and would need to recuse himself from the case.</p> <p>No details about the alleged shooting plot have been included in documents filed in state or federal court, and police have not revealed any motive.</p> <p>Richmond police issued a statement Wednesday saying Smith "stands behind the investigative work done by Richmond Police Detectives to stop a mass shooting planned for July 4th."</p> <p>A search warrant affidavit filed in state court said that after police received the tip, they contacted Homeland Security, then went to a home in Richmond, where police said both men lived. Officers seized two assault rifles, a handgun and hundreds of rounds of ammunition.</p>
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